

# Pupil participation in decision making and the role of school councils in primary schools: An exploration of the views of school council members and staff.

Submitted by Caroline Lafferty-Jenkins to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology in Educational, Child & Community Psychology, May 2017.

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Signed: ..... Caroline Lafferty-Jenkins

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## **Abstract**

A child's right to have their opinion in decisions which affect them given due regard forms the basis of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) which was ratified by the UK government in 1991. The term 'pupil voice' has been used by schools as a way of encapsulating this and a survey in 2007 suggested that 92% of primary schools in England and Wales had a school council in place (Whitty & Wisby, 2007a).

The aim of the current study was to elicit the views of key stage 2 school councillors and staff members about the role of school councils and pupil participation in decision making. In Phase One staff from three primary schools in the south west of England were interviewed about school councils and pupil participation in school. Data were analysed using thematic analysis and three themes emerged. In Phase Two 16 key stage 2 pupils, who were members of their own school's school council, took part. Mixed gender paired interviews were conducted to elicit their views about their role and pupil participation in decision making in their school. Interviews were followed by five weekly group sessions involving participatory activities to support and develop their understanding of their role as school councillors. Pupils from each school council had input into the topics explored in this part of the research.

Findings from Phase One suggest that staff regard school councils as being positive for the children involved but they differ in opinion in terms of the impact they have on the wider school population. Findings from Phase Two suggest school council members value being responded to by adults when they have been asked to express their views about a specific decision. School council members also perceive trust as being one of the main factors involved in their election by peers. Findings are discussed in relation to recent research about participation in decision making, the effectiveness of school councils and the importance of a participatory ethos within schools. Overall findings lead to the proposal of a model for use in schools to support the participation of pupils in decision making. The model is based on the existing model conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC by Lundy (2007) but incorporates a shared participatory ethos and adult response as required factors. Limitations of the



current study as well as suggestions for future research and implications for EP practice are discussed.

# **Chapter One Introduction**

## **1.1 Chapter overview**

I begin this chapter with my own personal perspective in relation to this research. I then explore the definitions of participation from a children's rights perspective and discuss the impact the UNCRC (1989) has had on recent UK government policy in terms of children and young people's participation in decision making. I will also highlight the variation across the UK in terms of how the UNCRC's Article 12 is interpreted and promoted in different contexts before focusing on educational settings. I identify and comment upon several typologies of participation often used to identify the level of participation occurring. I also highlight the possible role of the school council as a mechanism for facilitating pupil participation before exploring the relevance of the current research to the practice of educational psychology. I conclude with a short summary outline of the thesis.

## **1.2 Personal perspective**

Prior to beginning training as an educational psychologist, I worked as a primary teacher in several mainstream schools in England. It was during this time that I developed an interest in pupils' involvement in decision making in school. In each school I worked at, there was a school council but I noticed that they varied in terms of pupils' and staff's view of them and in their role in school. When I asked a child in my class who had initially said that he wanted to be on the school council but then changed his mind, why he no longer wanted to join, he said that he thought it was a waste of time because the adults decide what they do and they do not get a real say in what happens in school. Another child said that he would not be any good in meetings because he couldn't read very well and would not be able to feedback to class. These encounters, together with a broader understanding of the pressures under which teaching staff can find themselves, left me feeling that school councils seemed to be a potential barrier to pupil participation and inclusive practice. This left me eager to pursue research in this area when the opportunity arose.

## **1.3 Context**

### **1.3.1 Children's Rights**

The importance placed upon a child or young person's right to express their views and participate in decisions which affect them has been widely recognised since the introduction of the UNCRC (1989). This was ratified by the UK government in 1991 and embedded in the Children's Act 1989 which made it a legal requirement for young people to be consulted and involved in decisions that affect them.

Of specific relevance to the current research is Article 12 of the UNCRC which states:

1. 'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law' (p.5).

The term 'pupil voice' has been used as a way of distilling the aims of Article 12 of the UNCRC; however, it has been argued that it only serves to dilute its full meaning (Lundy, 2007). It has also been argued that the UNCRC statements are too vague and open to adults' interpretation (Kelly, 1997) and has faced criticism over having too narrow a focus on a specific view of childhood, one which emphasises individual rights over more collective cultures (Valentin and Meinert, 2009).

### **1.3.2 Wider political context**

Since the UNCRC's ratification in 1991, there have been several UK national policies and legislation promoting the involvement of children and young people in decisions which affect them (DfES, 2003; DfES 2004; The Children's Act,

2004). In 2003 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) introduced the *Every Child Matters* agenda which had as one of its five main outcomes: every child should have the support they need to make a positive contribution (DfES, 2003).

The most recent SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014a) emphasises the child and young person's involvement in decisions which affect them. This places the greatest emphasis to date on placing children, young people and their families' views at the centre of all future plans being developed.

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 reinforces the position that all children and young people should have assumed capability to make decisions and that if this is in doubt, then efforts should be made to help them make informed decisions. According to the Mental Capacity Act 2005, judgments made about someone's capacity to make a decision must be on a decision by decision basis. This supports the view that capacity can change over time and between contexts. Moreover it states that the ability to make decisions does not necessarily mean that they have to be what others might consider to be sensible decisions. This may contradict the views of adults working with young children or children with special educational needs who perceive these groups as vulnerable and not capable of making decisions. These adults may view their role as that of protector, working for children and young people rather than with them (Bragg, 2007). Research into perceptions of childhood and the implications for pupil involvement in decision making is explored further in Chapter Two.

### **1.3.3 Variation across the UK**

Building a culture of participation in organisations which work with children and young people has been identified as being crucial to successfully involving children and young people in meaningful ways (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin & Sinclair, 2003a). Despite a range of published guidance promoting the importance of Article 12, it has been reported that its realisation in UK law and practice is highly variable (Children's Commissioner, 2014). While there has been increasing governmental support for children and young people's participation (Percy-Smith, 2010), there has been variation among the separate

legislative assemblies and governments. A survey by the Children's Rights Alliance for England (2009) reported on the local implementation of UNCRC in England. It reported inconsistency among local authorities (LAs), with 55% of LAs 'adopting' the UNCRC and 45% not yet having done so.

In relation to educational settings, the government published statutory guidance for local authorities and maintained schools when considering how best to provide opportunities for pupils to be consulted on matters affecting them or contribute to decision making in school (DfE, 2014b). Although the guidance is statutory, it reminds the reader on the first page that, 'the UNCRC has not been incorporated into national law, so there is no statutory duty to comply with it' (p.1). It is also aimed at local authority maintained schools and does not refer to English free schools or academies.

In 2014 The Department of Education in Northern Ireland issued supporting guidance to grant maintained schools highlighting the importance of pupil participation in decision making in schools and encouraged all schools to find meaningful ways of involving children and young people in their education (DoE, 2014). The Welsh Government has adopted the UNCRC and child's voice at the heart of its legislation, making it statutory in 2010, and has translated it into the seven core aims for all children and young people in Wales (Welsh government, 2010). In Scotland, recent policy has emphasised the importance of incorporating the principles of the UNCRC in work with children and young people (Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014). The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (2015) has a website with useful materials, such as the '7 Golden Rules for Participation' to facilitate and promote participation in different contexts including education.

Outside the UK, in Ireland, the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2015-2020 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015) endorsed and featured Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation, which is based on her model of child participation (Lundy, 2007). This model of participation has influenced this research and will be further discussed along with several other models of participation in the next section.

### **1.3.4 Definitions of participation**

There is not a single universally agreed definition of participation (Davey, Burke and Shaw, 2010). Having reviewed the current literature, it seems that participation is conceptualised and operationalised in different ways. According to Treseder (1997), it is a process where someone has influence over decisions about their own lives which leads to change. This point was stressed by Kirby et al., (2003a) when they commented that participation is more than being present or just taking part and must include having some influence on decisions and being able to take action.

This type of active participation can be facilitated, according to McNeish and Newman (2002), in four ways:

- addressing attitudinal barriers
- creating more participatory structures and processes
- achieving inclusive participation
- motivating young people to be involved.

Each of these elements occur to some extent in the literature reviewed for this research in Chapter Two when models conceptualising participation in decision making are explored in further detail.

Although the focus of this research is around pupil participation in decision making in schools and in the perceived role of school councils, it is also important to highlight the view that children and young people's participation in decisions affecting their lives should be experienced throughout their lives and across contexts in their everyday experiences rather than restricted to isolated, formal occasions. Percy-Smith (2010) argues that people's preoccupation with participation in decision making is not conducive to this goal:

One of the major problems with participation has been its widespread preoccupation with involvement in decision-making rather than a wider spectrum of activities which characterise how young people engage with and make sense of their worlds and through which one could argue their

well-being, identity and citizenship status is realised (Percy-Smith, 2010, p.5).

The above research is explored further in Chapter Two together with the models of participation which demonstrate how participation in decision making has been conceptualised.

### **1.3.5 School councils**

School councils have been defined as being 'a representative group of students who have been proposed and elected by their peers to represent their views and raise issues with the Senior managers and Governors of their school' (School Councils UK, 2006). School councils have been promoted as a way of facilitating participation from a citizenship perspective (Crick, 1998) as well as from a children's rights perspective. The former was recommended in *The Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools Report*; and the latter by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005), when it was recommended that the UK government should take further steps to promote, facilitate and monitor systematic, meaningful and effective participation of all groups of children in society, including in school, for example, through school councils (p.7). This highlights the different reasons schools may have for setting up a school council and therefore why it is important for schools to be clear about the values underpinning their own school councils since this will affect its role and function. The literature in this area will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Two.

### **1.3.6 Relevance to educational psychology**

Promoting inclusion is a key part of the educational psychologist's (EP's) role and the present research explores this concept from an adult and child perspective. It also highlights how inclusion can be embedded by pupils through generating a child-led understanding of it and actively using participatory methods to enable all children in a school community regardless of ability, to participate in decision making and thereby feel a sense of self-efficacy,

belonging and agency. The literature relating to these is discussed in Chapter Two. These factors are important to a child's sense of psychological well-being and mental health, which is currently of crucial importance in schools. However, there is a risk that changes to local authorities and to EP services, such as an increase in different models of traded services and in the number of private EPs, will impact upon the extent to which the child or young person's voice is at the centre of their work (Hardy and Hobbs, 2017).

EPs have the skills and knowledge to support staff to develop creative and flexible ways of eliciting the views of all children and young people in all educational settings. Being able to work at systemic, group and individual level means that our contribution to developing schools understanding and implementation of the UNCRC Article 12 are embedded within school and participation in decision making is regarded and implemented as an on-going process as opposed to separate decisions. It is part of our professional obligation to ensure the principles of recent government legislation are upheld (Children and Families Act 2014; Equality Act 2010) as identified in the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Standards of proficiency for professional psychologists 2015 and BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct 2009.



## **Chapter Two      Literature review**

### **2.1 Overview of chapter**

When searching the existing literature, I accessed databases including the *British Education Index* and *Education Research Complete* to locate recent peer reviewed journals. These included, amongst others, *Children and Society*, *Educational Psychology in Practice* and *Educational Action Research*. I also obtained further related literature from citations within the literature already identified. Search engines such as *Google* and *Google Scholar* were consulted to locate recent relevant journal articles, books, websites and government publications. The search terms used when searching for literature included: 'children's rights', 'pupil participation in decision making', 'pupil voice', 'school council', 'participatory techniques', 'visual research methods', 'participatory peer research', 'elicit pupil voice' and 'school ethos'. Given that pupil participation is a broad area of research and while I organised the literature under two main headings, I acknowledge there is overlap between them. I categorised the literature under the following definitions:

#### **Literature relating to participation in decision making**

- Typologies and models of children and young people's participation
- Children and young people's views about participation in decision making
- Adults' views about pupil participation in decision making
- Research around benefits of pupil participation in decision making
- School ethos and culture

#### **Literature relating to school councils**

- purpose of school councils
- school council members
- eliciting the views of other pupils

## 2.2 Definitions and models of participation

There are different definitions of participation and the one adopted will often depend upon the underpinning drivers of those involved. These drivers or perspectives include children's rights, active citizenship, school improvement and personalisation (Whitty and Wisby, 2007b). Hardy and Hobbs (2017) describe participation as a slippery construct and propose a set of principles which may be helpful when trying to ensure that there is capacity for children to act and gain agency in their everyday interactions across different contexts. These principles include ensuring EP work is underpinned by the children's rights agenda, viewing participation as a part of everyday life and ensuring our work as being with children rather than about them.

While Sinclair (2004, p.110) argued that in practice the term participation can often be used to mean being 'listened to' or 'consulted' which implies a rather passive interpretation, she proposed that participation is a multi-dimensional term, consisting of four key dimensions: level of participation, focus of the decision making in which children may be involved, nature of participation activity and the children and young people (CYP) involved. She goes on to identify three influential forces leading to increased participation. Firstly, she highlights the consumer movement, which emphasises the rights of service users, a group to which children are increasingly thought to belong. Secondly, the conceptualisation of children as being competent social actors who are knowledgeable of and able to contribute to their own lives (Mayall, 2002; Harcourt and Hagglund, 2013) and finally, the influence of the UNCRC, 1989 emphasising children's rights.

In his aim to contribute towards a theory of children's participation, Thomas (2007) emphasises the differing definitions and confusion that can occur between the terms participation and consultation. He highlights that for some consultation is a sub-category of participation, while for others it is separate activity. Another interpretation of consultation is provided by Shier (2001) who argues that in consultation children do not participate at the stage where decisions are made whereas in higher levels of participation they do. In terms of participation in schools, Cross, Hulme and McKinney (2014) have summarised

it as interactive engagement in expressive, learning and decision making activities within the school community. Since the focus of the current research is upon pupils' participation in decision making in schools, I now narrow the focus of this review to literature related more specifically to this area.

In terms of children and young people's participation in decisions which affect them in school, Hart's (1992) ladder of participation provides a useful framework (see appendix 1) set within a citizenship discourse, for thinking about levels of pupil power in decision making and can be used to distinguish between young people's meaningful involvement and tokenism (Frost, 2007; Lundy, 2007). The first three steps on the ladder represent stages of non-participation of which 'tokenism' is the third. Hart (1992) defines tokenism as occurring when children are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express these views or the scope of the ideas they can express. While it has been argued as being one of the most helpful models in participation (Barn & Franklin, 1996), its validity as a concept has been questioned as it suggests a hierarchical model of participation. Hart's (1992) model also partly inspired a model concerned with participatory methods in local communities which demonstrates the link between the mode of participation, the involvement of local people and the relationships of research and action to local people (Cornwall, 1996). Cornwall (1996) argued that in the context of health research, it is often carried out on participants rather than with or by them and her model highlights the circumstances in which this is most likely to happen.

Rather than a replacement of Hart's (1992) model, Shier (2001) suggested a non-hierarchical model based on five levels of participation with three stages of commitment at each level: openings, opportunities and obligations (see appendix 2) that could be an additional tool for planning for participation. It could be that different levels of participation are more appropriate for different tasks, as other authors have suggested (Treseder, 1997; Simovska & Jensen, 2009). Treseder's (1997) model is non-hierarchical and shows degrees of involvement in decision making in a circular layout (see appendix 3). It could be argued that in a school setting, there will always be adult control and so degrees of involvement may seem more achievable (Dynamix and Save the Children, 2002).

Lundy (2007), who argues for the discourse on pupil voice to be firmly located within the framework of children's rights, asserts that children's perspectives should be viewed as an integral part of school discourse rather than an attempt to undermine authority and she argues that her proposed model of participation conceptualises Article 12 (see appendix 4). This involves the consideration of four factors: time, space, audience and influence. The model has been implemented in a range of educational settings, including in the children's cultural education department of an art museum (Mai and Gibson, 2011). The fact that it can be interpreted across settings is a strength of the model. A further key strength of the model is the recognised need for Article 12 to be interpreted in conjunction with other rights rather than in isolation so that it can be implemented fully. For example, Lundy (2007) highlights how Article 5 of the UNCRC 'gives children the right to receive guidance and direction from adults in the exercise of their Convention rights, including Article 12' (p.935).

Lundy (2007) explores the possible ambiguity around the phrase in Article 12 about a child 'who is capable of forming his or her own views' and how this might be thought to mean 'a mature view' as opposed to just 'a view'. This further highlights the role of adults in the implementation of children's rights. A limitation of the model is that it does not sufficiently take into account the existing ethos within a setting and the impact this can have on effective participation in decision making. A further limitation is that although Lundy (2007) highlights the need for adults to respond to children when they have been asked for their views, this is not made explicit enough in the model.

### **2.3 Children's and young people's views about participation in decision making**

While Article 12 of the UNCRC states that children have the right to participate, it also highlights they have the right not to. Stafford, Laybourn and Walker (2003) conducted research into children and young people's views about consultation. They found that 'most young people did not want to spend large amounts of time being consulted ...nor did they want to be involved in taking forward the results of consultation' (p.371). Instead the authors conclude that children want to be consulted if: it is done properly, it is about issues directly

affecting them and if they see it as likely to benefit them or other young people. This supports the final element required for effective participation in practice, motivating young people to be involved (McNeish and Newman, 2002).

A criticism of the study by Stafford et al., (2003) is the lack of detail about how children and young people's consent was sought. Given that participants ranged from 3 to 18 years old, I think it would have been beneficial to explain how the authors ensured that all children and young people understood what they were participating in and about their right to withdraw.

The authors explained that they used a process of informal conversations about 'deciding things' when working with the pre-school group and that adults who knew the children, such as carers were also involved in this process. They did not, however, specify the detail of how this was facilitated, how the group responded to the topic of deciding things or how their views were represented in the findings. The findings from all groups included comments by participants but they were not labelled which made it difficult to see how and the extent to which the pre-school group was included.

In terms of their method, they chose to use group interviews as opposed to focus groups but did not clarify why they chose one over the other or whether they regard them as being one and the same as the terms are sometimes used inter-changeably (Thomas, 2013). However, distinguishing between the two is important since the role of the researcher is different in each and therefore the dynamic and responses may be different.

Stafford et al., (2003) acknowledge some of the possible limitations of their approach and highlight the steps taken to minimise them. For example they state that they asked those participants involved in group interviews to complete a short open-ended questionnaire to provide triangulation as group discussion may have inhibited minority viewpoints. There was no further detail provided however regarding the content of the questionnaire or how those who may have required support in accessing it were supported. It was also unclear as to whether the same questionnaire was used for all age groups. I think it may be too broad an age range to use the same questionnaire with, as their interests, understanding and level of engagement is likely to vary.

While twelve of the group interviews were with children from mainstream education, six further group interviews were conducted with participants from 'more excluded backgrounds' as the authors put it. Among these were a special needs group of ten year olds with learning difficulties. This raises some issues regarding their understanding of mainstream education and inclusion or at the very least, questions how they selected the groups for interviews across mainstream schools. It could be argued that one would expect members of the mainstream groups to include children with a range of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The absence of an explanation regarding how participants accessed the questionnaire, could be argued as being evidence to support this.

Davey, Burke and Shaw (2010) examined the extent to which children living in England felt they had a voice and influence in matters affecting them at school, at home and in the area where they live. It involved 12 focus group interviews with children and young people aged between 3 and 20 from all over England. Davey et al., (2010) concluded that: most children in the study accepted the power differentials between adults and children, although this was tested more by older children; most children and young people were generally dissatisfied by the level of participation in their lives and finally that even very young children can take a rational and measured approach to decision making. I argue that a strength of the study was the measures taken to ensure that children and young people from different backgrounds and with varying experiences of decision making, were able to participate and understand what was happening. For example, refugees had a familiar adult in the room because they felt uneasy about speaking but still wanted to take part. The focus groups were organised depending on the participants' ages and for younger children, generic pictures were used with questions underneath to help focus the discussion. It could be argued that for children as young as three other methods may have been more appropriate in engaging them and gaining a deeper understanding of their views. I also thought however that having a separate group for disabled children and young people without an explanation as to why this was necessary was something which could have been further explained.

## **2.4 School staff's' views about pupil participation in decision making**

Although UNCRC Article 12 sets out children's rights in terms of participation, in everyday school life as in other contexts, children and young people are to an extent reliant on adults for this to take place. Bragg (2007) argues however that while teachers can help enable pupil participation in school, their support for pupil voice, as the author refers to it, can impact upon teachers in terms of their professional identities and relations with students and other members of staff. It has been argued that there needs to be a change of mind-set in terms of teachers' thinking to enable them to change their identity to incorporate working with children, rather than on behalf of them (Cook-Sather, 2002). Rudduck and Fielding (2006) argue that the popularity of student voice may lead to surface compliance. If for example teachers merely change their behaviour towards students because they have been told to, this could be difficult to sustain and perhaps not appear authentic. Authenticity has been identified as being an important factor in the credible development of pupil voice (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000).

Bragg (2007) highlights a need to develop teacher voice alongside pupil voice. She argues the need to not dismiss teachers' concerns regarding pupil voice and that their concerns should be acknowledged. This study involved the deputy head of a primary school introducing pupil voice initiatives over two years. One of its strengths was the case study approach which enabled her to explore the changing nature of staff's perceptions and concerns during this period. This arguably produced more in depth and richer findings regarding their identities as professionals and their relationships with each other and with pupils as they developed over time. She also states that 'Adult belief in student voice is essential to realise its potential' (Bragg, 2007, p.506). Although her research was concerned with pupil voice in school as opposed to pupil participation, it appears that she perceives pupil involvement as being dynamic. This could be interpreted as highlighting the importance of social interactions in its effectiveness.

Shier's (2001) model could be useful in this respect for seeing what change may be required for children's participation to meaningfully occur. It contains

questions for organisations to ask themselves in preparation for change. Exploring adults' perceptions and understanding of pupil participation in school will help to establish a shared understanding of the purpose of participation for that school. Previous research has included large scale questionnaires given to head teachers for example, about their views on school councils (Burnitt & Gunter, 2013); however, no further research involving interviewing a range of staff across primary schools regarding their perceptions of pupil participation in school and the role of school councils has been found when conducting this review.

In terms of the type of decisions that adults feel it is appropriate for children and young people to participate in, Cross et al., (2014) argue that event-based decisions, such as fundraising for charities, are more straight forward and less likely to challenge the power status quo between pupils and staff. They question however whether it is only serving to defer children and young people's involvement in decisions which affect them. It has been noted that within western society, from a citizenship perspective, a more informal form of civic engagement is on the increase (Cross et al., 2010; Annette, 2008) and this has been found to be reflected in schools, influenced by an increased awareness of global citizenship (Myers, 2010).

## **2.5 Benefits of participation in decision making**

The literature highlights a range of potential benefits of pupil participation in school and in the wider community for children and young people. These include educational benefits (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004) and benefits around personal development (Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Fielding & Bragg, 2003). Beneficial outcomes associated with child development (Emilsson and Folkesson, 2006) and increasing a sense of agency in one's own life (Sharp, 2014; Percy-Smith, 2010) have also been argued. Developing a sense of agency has been recognised as being an important stage of development (Bruner, 1996; Bandura, 2006). Rainio (2007) has argued that agency can be regarded as 'a prerequisite for and as an outcome of meaningful, engaged and motivated learning' (p.150).



Research has also shown that the positive impact of pupil participation should not be assumed. Tisdall (2015) for example highlights that it is necessary to distinguish between children's rights and children's well-being as both may be assumed to always co-exist. She argues that the discourse around well-being is often about positive outcomes and improvement whereas the UNCRC has only served to provide minimum standards to aim for. Moreover she states that well-being lends itself to being measured in different ways but participation, from a children's rights perspective, is a much trickier construct to judge. It may therefore follow that in educational settings, which are drilled in achieving and meeting standards, developing initiatives to enhance well-being may appear to be a better option.

A further example of the need for caution when assuming a positive impact of pupil participation is around the ways in which Article 12 can be summarised. The use of terms such as 'voice of the child' or 'pupil voice' have been regarded as contributing to people viewing participation as having a cosy, 'chicken soup' effect whereby children's views are always regarded as being unquestionably good (Sloth-Nielsen, 1996, p.337). Tisdall (2013) argues that the idea of hearing children's voices as a way of promoting children's rights has been powerful in a country with the traditional proverb of 'children being seen but not heard'. She also identifies drawbacks such as how emphasising voice can risk excluding those children who do not communicate verbally or perhaps require more time or support to communicate.

Hartas (2011) highlights a need to explore young people's experiences of participation and challenges the view of participation as being inherently good. While it could be argued that pupil participation challenges hierarchies in schools and benefit young people and schools as organisations, it has been less acknowledged that participation can function as a tool for social control.

In their systematic review into the effects of pupil participation in decision making in schools, Mager and Nowak (2012) identified the discourses from which pupil participation can be understood: as part of the concept of pupil voice, (Fielding, 2001; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007); as the core of citizenship education (Apple & Beane, 1999) and as an important factor in school improvement (Lodge, 2005). Mager and Nowak (2012) found that different types of participation appeared to have different effects, apart from improvements in

school ethos, which emerged for all types of student participation. The implication of this finding for the current research will be explored further in section 2.7. In terms of effects of student participation in councils, of the 28 cases included, moderate evidence was found for increased life skills, self-esteem and social status. Mager and Nowak (2012) concluded however that the effects only affect those children directly involved in decision making and so led them to conclude that the typical problem with participation is that in practice it is sometimes restricted to representatives and so can lead to the existence of elites. The authors also emphasise how future research could focus on designing and evaluating successful interventions relating to participation.

Mager and Nowak (2012) clearly identified the criteria used when choosing literature to include in the review. Although they did not include books due to funding and time limits, they did describe their system for rating the quality of studies to include. This strengthens the validity of their findings since they covered a wide range of research designs, both quantitative and qualitative. A further strength was their clarity in defining the type of participation they were researching. In their research, one –off consultations and simple acts such as answering questions were not considered as being participation.

## **2.6 School culture and ethos**

The social interactions between staff and pupils on a daily basis help to create the school ethos, which as research has shown, can be important in allowing pupils to feel able to participate in school (Leitch & Mitchell, 2007; Cross et al., 2014). Leitch and Mitchell (2007) describe school cultures as being dynamic and negotiated and as ‘not only being the consciously contrived construction of a school’s value position as determined by those with power and authority but also as the unseen, unobservable collective wind that drives many of a school’s activities’ (p.55).

In terms of how pupil participation could influence the wider culture within schools, Lundy (2007) proposed that compliance with Article 12 will foster a positive school ethos. In her research into school ethos in primary schools, Donnelly (2000) argued that both the concepts of school culture and school

ethos are abstractions which are related to the behaviour of people within a school. School ethos can be defined from a positivist stance regarding it as an objective phenomenon, existing independently of the people and social events in an organisation or from an interpretivist position which regards it as being more informal, emerging from social interaction and process (Donnelly, 2000, pp.135-136). Donnelly, (2000) found a considerable difference between the espoused ethos officially supported by the school and the observed practices and interactions of school members.

Research based on contact theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) provides evidence for the need to develop an ethos which is supportive of pupil participation. Brewer and Miller's (1984) de-categorised contact model suggests that contact between groups, under certain conditions, allows in-group members to get to know out-group members as individuals and so reduces intergroup bias. They argue that just allowing different groups to mix does not lead to reduced intergroup bias. However, it is not possible to uphold those conditions in schools as pupils and staff come into contact with each other in different contexts every day (Dixon, Durheim & Tredoux, 2005). It is therefore essential to create carefully planned interventions and opportunities for contact. This would support the development of an inclusive ethos built upon positive social interactions throughout the school (Sinclair, 2004). This may well begin by being included in written policies in schools or other educational organisations but needs to go further and be felt and experienced by those children and young people in them (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin & Sinclair, 2003a). In terms of affecting the role of the EP therefore, the role that school culture or ethos can have in the successful implementation of pupil participation has possible implications for practice at a systemic level, for example when working with schools to develop policies around inclusion or equality. The introduction and facilitation of a school council has been argued to be complex because of the related changes throughout the school in terms of routines and relationships (Alderson, 2000). As well as their potential impact on school ethos, the role and impact of school councils are now discussed in the following section.

## 2.7 School councils

Cross et al., (2014) argue that school councils can act as a pivotal mediating space for pupil participation. They concluded that their findings support the argument that school councils as a stand-alone approach are not an effective way of facilitating citizenship participation. In addition to Lundy (2007) whose model discussed earlier in this chapter is based on a Children's Rights view of participation, they too emphasise the need for space to be provided for effective participation to occur. It has been argued that there is a need to reconsider participation in terms of a more diverse set of social processes in everyday environments and interactions (Percy-Smith, 2010). Percy-Smith (2010) argued that focussing on participation in decision-making specifically rather than participation more generally has led to an emphasis on more formal structures. In educational settings, school councils could be argued as being an example of a more formal structure. He argued:

Part of the problem with the way young people's participation has been approached is the prevalence and reliance on representative structures for participation which mean that many young people are limited in opportunities for direct participation and are not actively involved (p111).

Given that many schools have school councils in place, it would therefore be useful to explore how members perceive their role and whether they consider it to be as representatives of their peers or something else.

Tokenism is also an issue concerning school councils. Within wider society, participation which appears tokenistic to those involved has been found to have a negative impact (Stafford, Laybourn, Hill & Walker, 2003). In terms of how tokenism has been found to affect school councils, Wyness (2003) describes school councils as 'a means to teacher-driven educational ends' (p.237).

Alderson's (2000) study suggests the importance of perceived attitudes of staff towards young people's opinions. If pupils perceived staff as not respecting them, then they were more likely to believe the council as being tokenistic. As research suggests, the purpose of school councils is often unclear amongst staff and can be viewed as tokenistic by pupils if not seen to be serving the pupils they are elected to represent.

Research has shown that children have mixed feelings about school councils (Stafford et al., 2003). In a study exploring disaffected students' views of participation, Hartas (2011) found that students regarded student councils as being formed by and for the 'clever students, those who get good marks' (p.106). He also commented on the negative implications for participation saying 'if you join the student council then you are being bullied by the others' (p 106). While this study is valuable in that it seeks the young people's views, having teachers identify them as being disaffected may have impacted on their own sense of identity and encouraged them to take up the role of disaffected student when taking part in the small group discussions and interviews. Hartas (2011) concluded that systemic constraints can lead to attributing disaffection to an internal failure rather than a response to policy failure. I think this was a strength of the study in that it challenged the perception of participation as being automatically beneficial and instead explored how systemic changes would be needed to support these young people to participate. This is another example of how adult support is needed for children and young people to participate effectively as is their right. Hartas (2011) highlighted that the nature of inclusion that was offered was not perceived by the young people as meeting their needs. Adult support is therefore necessary to ensure that the way participation is facilitated is meaningful and relevant to those involved.

As part of their research into exploring ways to develop more child-oriented ways of running school councils, Cox and Robinson-Plant (2005) identified a power dynamic between school council members and teachers as a possible barrier to effectiveness. They suggested teacher beliefs to be an issue in terms of school council effectiveness which has been supported elsewhere in the literature (Franklin, 1995; Alderson, 2000). The validity of the above research however could be questioned as their data collection methods in the first part of the study were not explained and therefore the possibility of interviewer bias could not be established or evaluated. Cox and Robinson-Plant (2006) also argued that school councils which rely on the literacy based format for running meetings left children feeling reliant on adults for council meetings to work. They argued that this did not help to reduce the power dynamic in terms of balancing relationships between adults and children and between children themselves both during and out of school council. While developing the use of

visual strategies to help empower those children whose literacy skills are not as strong for example, it does not assume that there will not be power imbalances between different groups of children (Kellett, 2011).

### **2.7.1 Purpose of school councils**

If a school council is created as an attempt to fulfil a school's citizenship requirements or to tick the box for considering pupil voice, then its function and the impression it leaves on other pupils may be very different than if it is driven from the discourse of children's rights (Whitty & Wisby, 2007b). Cotmore (2004) highlighted that the growing interest in school councils over the last fifteen years reflects a broader growth in the participation of children and young people in the planning and provision of public services (Kirby & Bryson, 2002). School councils were promoted by the government from a citizenship perspective by Crick (1998); however, it stopped short of making them statutory 'for fear of overburdening schools and teachers' (p.25). By not calling for school councils to be made statutory, it places children's involvement and participation in decisions affecting them below that of academic standards. Wyse (2001) deemed the reasons given for not making school councils statutory as inadequate and argued that 'there has been too much emphasis on the products of the curriculum, rather than on the processes in the school which could be improved to facilitate participation' (p.215). This provides further support for the role of positive relationships between staff and pupils and the subsequent ethos which is created.

Cox and Robinson-Plant (2005) found that while primary teachers involved in their research ranked 'giving children a voice' above 'learning how to run meetings', in practice there was a tension between the two aims. This highlights the importance of schools needing to explicitly share the reasons for having a school council, whether it be from a children's rights perspective or a citizenship perspective as this will impact on how the council is run and the content of its meetings. Whitty and Wisby (2007b) suggest two further drivers for pupil participation which underpin different views of the purpose of school councils. In addition to children's rights and active citizenship, they identify school improvement and personalisation as also being key drivers. They also explain

the priorities for each driver which in turn highlights the differences between them and in so doing provides support for the argument that schools should explicitly identify and clarify their own position in terms of their understanding of the purpose of their own school council.

### **2.7.2 Impact of school councils**

The literature suggests that students who typically make up school councils are well spoken, have good literacy skills and are popular in class (Cox & Robinson-Plant, 2006). Burnitt and Gunter (2013) surveyed 50 primary school head teachers in a local authority in north west England and 100% of responding schools reported having a school council in place. While they approached fifty schools, Burnitt and Gunter (2013) did not comment on the number of schools which responded; however, as the authors highlighted, the use of random sampling allowed for data collection from a varied range of schools which could be regarded as broadly representative. They found that while school leaders wanted the school council to act as a mechanism through which children could raise their views and concerns whilst promoting equality, instead they argued that the emphasis placed on having effective communication skills appeared to have the opposite effect in that it limited the range of pupils who could take part. This research demonstrates that for the school council to diversify its membership it needs to work from a children's rights perspective and develop more inclusive methods in how it runs and how it engages with pupils in school.

In terms of developing this research further, there is potential to develop their findings methodologically. They outlined three main aims in their research: to examine the current position of school councils in terms of their organization, the issues they address and the views held by senior leaders regarding the setting of agendas. While the first two aims would understandably lead to the use of a quantitative survey, the third could have been strengthened by using qualitative techniques such as semi-structured interviews. This methodological change would provide a richer, more in- depth analysis of the views of school leaders which might have strengthened their findings in response to this last aim.

There has been little recent research into exploring primary school council members' experiences and perceptions of their role in terms of pupil participation. A case study by Cotmore (2004) however did elicit the perceptions of school council members in a rural primary school. Although pupil participation may be interpreted from a children's rights perspective, it is acknowledged that it is important to evaluate the impact of participation on pupils and not assume that they feel empowered just by being involved in the process. Participation without empowerment involves children expressing their view in some way through consultation, which eventually gets reported back to professionals who may or may not respond (Percy-Smith, 2010). Sinclair (2004) highlighted the lack of research around the evaluations regarding the process of participation and its impact on the children and young people who take part or the adults or organisations involved.

It has been argued that it tends to be only the students directly involved with the school council who benefit, in terms of developing skills such as listening and responsibility (Cotmore, 2004; Hartas, 2011; Taylor & Johnson, 2002). Although education legislation has emphasised pupil voice and participation (DfES, 2003, 2004), it has been suggested that a consequence of its growing popularity can lead to surface compliance, with schools feeling the pressure to be seen to be doing it rather than considering why they should be (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p.228). For example, it has been argued that establishing a school council will not necessarily be effective if it becomes 'an exercise in damage limitation rather than an opportunity for constructive consultation' (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000, p.83). Introducing a school council to pay lip service to current government policy can increase students' scepticism (Alderson, 2000).

Cox & Robinson-Plant (2005) conducted an action-oriented project in three Norfolk primary schools and concluded that more child oriented ways of running school councils were needed. The school councils they observed had adopted the principle of representative democracy rather than participatory democracy which they defined as one in which all had an equal voice. This potential problem of school councils only benefiting those who are members has been highlighted in previous research (Cross et al., 2014). Their study explored the views of teachers, school council members and non-school council pupils using focus groups. It aimed to change the way school councils were run by



introducing a range of visual strategies for communication and decision making. They concluded that the processes involved in running school councils were limiting the degree of participation children could have in decision making. A criticism of this research is that they did not explain how they chose their sample; the procedures used in focus groups or why indeed they decided to use a focus group. The study did not outline how they analysed their findings and while conclusions seemed relevant, the absence of detail detracted from its value and robustness in terms of validity and reliability. It could be argued that these are standards best suited to quantitative research however in terms of widely regarded qualitative standards (Yardley, 2015), this study still falls short.

## **2.8 Children as co-researchers**

The limitations of school councils and subsequent need for training or development has been recognised at a political level and within the literature around pupil participation (Welsh Assembly Government, 2015; Burnitt & Gunter, 2013; Cox & Robinson-Plant, 2005). Whitty and Wisby (2007b) identified the need to provide training to develop skills relevant to participation as being an important component in supporting effective pupil voice and the involvement of all pupils.

There has been however a growing amount of literature which has developed the use of participatory research with children and young people in which the children and young people are co-researchers. Kim (2015) argues that in having child researchers, there is a risk of encouraging child inequality if not all children get the opportunity to take part. In relation to school councils, training school council members to develop their understanding of and ability to use a range of participatory techniques to elicit pupils' views is inspired not only from a children's rights perspective but also a belief that children are experts in their own lives and so are well placed to elicit the views of other children (Kellett, 2011). In taking this position however, the current research does not assume that children can necessarily be experts in other children's lives (Tisdall, 2012).

One of the aims of research by Kilpatrick, McCartan, McAlister and McKeown (2007) was to highlight some of the methodological issues faced by researchers

when working with young people as co-researchers. As part of a peer research project study, they asked the peer researchers to keep journals in which to record their thoughts and views about each stage of the project. The use of diaries in participatory research has been documented in the literature with different degrees of success (Punch, 2002). Kilpatrick et al., (2007) found that it revealed a different perspective on communication issues that both academics and peer researchers had experienced during the research. While adult researchers experienced frustration over keeping track of individual peer researchers' progress, the peer researchers were more concerned about being kept updated of the activities of other group members. Kilpatrick et al., (2007) conclude that knowing how other group members were succeeding in their tasks was identified as being important by the peer researchers and that this is something they would consider in similar future research.

It has been argued that children are not expected to be reflexive regarding the impact their epistemological views have on their research (Bucknall, 2012). Kershner and Hargreaves (2012), however, found that primary age children have views on the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired from a range of sources. The development of childhood studies has led to the foregrounding of children's views and respect for their agency (Smith, 2011). Research has demonstrated that children can think seriously about complex issues (Wyse, 2001).

## **2.9 Eliciting the views of children and young people**

Listening to children and young people is a crucial role for EPs and in recent years there has been a growing body of research involving the use of participatory techniques for doing so (Gersch, Lipscomb & Potton, 2017). Previous studies have utilised participatory methods to enable children to express themselves. In their research into children's rights as experienced by young children in their everyday lives, Harcourt and Hagglund (2013) invited children to use their everyday communication methods such as drawings and paintings which may or not have included narrative. Photographs have also been used during interviews, known as photo elicitation interviews (PEI), with children and young people as a way of eliciting their views (Epstein, Stevens,

McKeever and Baruchel, 2006; Harper, 2002). Cremin, Mason and Busher, (2011) used the PEI with secondary pupils when exploring the views of those pupils identified by staff as being either engaged or disaffected. Their findings led them to conclude that the use of photographs both reduced the power imbalance between pupils and researchers and allowed the pupils identified as disaffected to express themselves in greater depth.

The research by Cremin et al., (2011) has influenced the current research in terms of the issues it raises and its use of participatory techniques based on the use of (PRA) but adapted for use in school. The use of participatory techniques based on participatory rural appraisal (PRA) (Chambers, 2009) has been found to help with changing power relations between adults and children in that children can set the agenda rather than being limited by having to answer questions from the researcher's agenda (O'Kane, 2008). Kirby (2001) described PRA as a methodology as much as a set of methods and that its use challenges the power imbalance between child and adult and uses age appropriate techniques which enable their participation. PRA is discussed further in chapter three.

The diamond ranking activity is an example of a participatory technique adapted from PRA. Using this activity allows children and young people to play an active role in research with an effort to elicit their views whilst not making assumptions about what they think (Clark, 2012). It has been used in previous research to help facilitate discussion around the classroom (Hopkins, 2010) and around children's involvement in decision making when they were looked after by local authorities (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). Hill, Croydon, Greathead, Kenny, Yates and Pellicano (2016) adopted a diamond ranking activity amongst other participatory techniques in their research into the experiences of children and young people being educated in residential special schools. One of the aims of their research was to develop techniques and approaches to support the inclusion of all children. A key strength of the paper was the authors' clear purpose and detailed explanation of the activities used and their justification for doing so. For example, they acknowledged that the diamond ranking activity required a high level of reasoning and language skills and would not therefore be appropriate for young people with complex communication needs.

While recognising the benefits of using participatory methods with children and young people, Punch (2002) emphasised the importance of not assuming their use does not come without problems. She identifies the cultural environment, physical setting, research questions and competencies of the researcher as being important to consider when using these methods. Her research highlighted the reflexivity required when conducting this research and asks whether certain methods are being used with children because they are fun, or because they also generate useful and relevant data.

## 2.9 Gaps in the literature and overall aims

This literature review has highlighted gaps in the literature which this research planned to address. Table 1 shows the research aims for the current research together with the rationale and research question linked to each one.

Table 1. Rationale and associated research question for each research aim

<b>Research aims</b>	<b>Rationale/ gap being addressed</b>	<b>Research questions</b>
To explore primary school council members' perceptions of their role in school.	Develop use of participatory techniques in paired interviews to elicit Key stage 2 children's views.	3 and 4
To develop school council members' skills in using a range of participatory techniques to elicit the views of other pupils.	Providing opportunities for pupils on school council to develop their skills while being part of the research.	3 and 4
To explore primary school staff's perceptions of pupil participation in school.	This research used semi structured interviews whereas previous research has used group interviews (Cox & Robinson Plant, 2005).	1
To explore primary school staff's views of school councils.	Use of paired interviews and participatory techniques to elicit pupils' views.	2

To explore the relevance of existing models of participation in education.	To explore the possibility or need to develop or adapt existing models.	1-4
To contribute to the growing body of literature around the use of participatory techniques to elicit children's views.	Use of paired interviews and participatory techniques to elicit the views of pupils on the school council in Key Stage 2.	3 and 4
To explore primary school children's views about knowledge.	Previous research (Kershner & Hargreaves, 2012) has explored children's epistemological positions and this research aimed to further explore school councillors' understanding of knowledge.	4

## **Chapter Three      Methodology**

This chapter outlines the specific aims and research questions for each phase of the current research. It also provides a diagrammatic overview of both phases. The philosophical assumptions underpinning the research are discussed in addition to the methodology and ethical considerations for each phase.

### **3.1 Specific aims of both phases**

#### Phase One

This phase of the research sought to address the gaps in the literature around how members of staff in primary schools perceive school councils and pupil participation. More specifically, the current research aimed to explore within a primary school context, how participation in decision making is perceived by adults in school.

#### Phase Two

The second phase aimed to elicit the views of key stage 2 school council members about their role and pupil involvement in decision making in school. In response to Mager and Nowak's (2012) emphasis on how future research could focus on designing and evaluating successful interventions relating to participation, I developed school council members' understanding of inclusion and enhanced their skills in eliciting the views of different pupils using a range of participatory techniques. I also ensured that they had the opportunity to participate in choosing aspects of their role that they would like to develop during our sessions as a group.

This phase consisted of three parts:

- initial paired interviews with key stage 2 school council members
- 5 weekly group sessions with each group of school council members
- final paired interviews of the same key stage 2 school council members

In addition to eliciting their views, I worked with the same key stage two members of the two school councils in the second phase of the research. The aim of this aspect of the research was to enhance their skills, knowledge and understanding in areas they perceived as being important to their specific council and around their role from a Children's Rights perspective so that they could apply these when their involvement in the research had ended. While I do not regard this element of the research as an intervention, I felt it was important not only to support the council members in their role after their involvement finished but also to compare their views around their role after having completed their sessions with their views before via a further paired interview. I kept notes from each session which I include in the discussion section for Phase Two.

### **3.1.1 Diagrammatic overview of both phases**

The current research is driven, in part, by my belief in the importance of Children's Rights in underpinning the purpose and aims of school councils. I therefore conducted the two phases of the current research in parallel rather than in a linear fashion as I did not want my interpretation of the staff members' views gained in Phase One to influence the direction of Phase Two, which involved gaining the views of pupils in the school council. Figure 1 offers a conceptual map of the two phases.

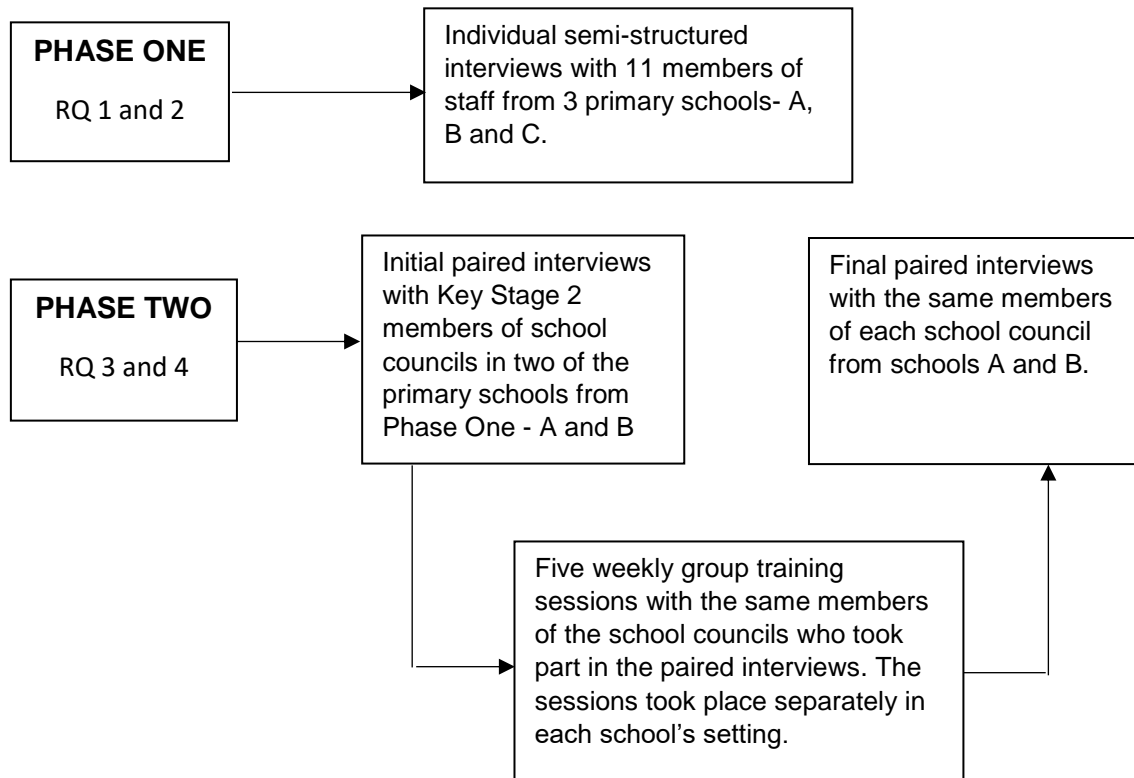


Figure 1 Diagrammatic overview of Phases One and Two

### 3.2 Research questions for both phases

Phase One research questions:

1. *What are the views of members of staff on pupils' participation in decision making in school?*
2. *How do members of staff view school councils?*

Phase Two research questions:

3. *How do members of school councils perceive their role?*
4. *How do members of school councils view pupil participation in decision making in school?*



### **3.3 Philosophical assumptions underpinning the research**

The current research is guided by the fundamental principles of humanistic psychology (Rogers, 1980). These have been summarised by Jarvis (2000) as being: motivation to self-actualise (reach their potential); people have the capacity to choose what is best for them; people are influenced by how they are treated by others and people should be helped to choose what they want in order to reach their potential. The argument previously made in this chapter regarding the importance of adults' and pupils' beliefs about pupil participation and the positive social interactions required to develop a school ethos which promotes participation is underpinned by this psychological approach.

I believe that the research questions are influenced by the researcher's value system and therefore do not agree that methods are free of ontological and epistemological assumptions which relate to the researcher (Grix, 2002). Instead I align more with Sparkes (1992) who considers the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions to influence all aspects of research.

I am also influenced in the second phase of the research by the feminist paradigm which utilises mixed methods to uncover new voices and perspectives (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Adopting this feminist lens when designing this phase of the research led me to recognise the power difference between pupils and staff in schools and the role that values play in research. Feminist researchers have called for an alternative conceptualisation of objectivity, suggesting that it be redefined as the reduction of bias because of adequate representation of diverse groups to ensure objectivity (Mertens, 2002). The feminist tenet acknowledges that as humans we are always in interdependent relationships and relationships with others are central to the process of knowing (Tuana, 1996). Feminist researchers can differ in terms of theoretical perspective, methodology and method but they all share a common pursuit of knowledge building that centres on the lives of women or other oppressed groups (Hesse-Biber, 2010). In the case of the current research, this translates as eliciting the views of primary school pupils who are members of their school council.

Epistemologically I take a constructivist position in both phases of the research. This holds that knowledge is developed through a process of interpretation (Waring, 2013). I therefore believe that it is important to recognise the researcher's role in research rather than try to remain outside of it. I believe that knowledge is not given but created and negotiated and that during an interview it is constructed through collaboration between interviewee and researcher (Yeo, Legard, Keegan, Ward, McNaughton Nicholls and Lewis, 2014). As Holstein and Gubrium (1997) argue, the researcher is not just a pipeline through which knowledge is transmitted.

### **3.4 Methodology for both phases**

This research is exploratory in that it aims to explore both staff's and school council members' views around pupil participation in decision-making and the role of the school council. The second part involved working with two school councils to develop their understanding of including others and the skills which they identified as being relevant to do their job as school councillors. While it is not action research, in that it does not involve action cycles over time, it does aim to help enable the members by working on issues they identified as relevant in their initial interviews and facilitate them to use the skills and understanding in their role after their involvement in the research.

#### **3.4.1 Use of participatory techniques**

The benefits of using practical or visual tasks with children and young people has been recognised in the literature (Clark, 2012; Clark and Moss, 2011; Punch, 2002; Harper, 2002; O'Kane, 2008). It has also been acknowledged that the type of methods chosen depends upon the children and young people involved, the cultural environment, physical setting, research questions and skills of the researcher (Punch, 2002). I decided to adopt a pragmatic approach in terms of design for Phase Two of the research given the various constraints associated with using participatory techniques (Davis, 2009). For example, I anticipated that time and space would be potential issues given that I planned to

work with a specific group of children from different classes each week for a set number of weeks. This would therefore have possible scheduling implications for school. I wanted to ensure that pupils were still keen to be involved so decided to use participatory activities to support the facilitation of the paired interviews.

One of the participatory activities I used was the diamond ranking activity. This is a technique derived from participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methodology and has been used as a participatory technique when exploring the views of children and young people (O’Kane, 2008; Hill et al., 2016). PRA falls within a constructivist paradigm and helps with changing power relations between adults and children because they are able to set the agenda as opposed to being restricted to answering questions set by researchers (O’Kane, 2008). I chose this technique because it was visual and something which could be adapted from the diamond formation to a simpler version if necessary. I also wanted to use an activity which would help facilitate discussion between the pair as it has been argued that it is the discussion around such sorting and ranking activities which provide a rich source of interpretation and meaning (Arthur et al., 2014; O’Kane, 2008).

### **3.4.2 Use of reflective journal**

As a researcher taking an interpretivist perspective in the current research, I recognise my involvement in the process and how my views and understanding of the world will impact upon my interpretation of the participants’ views. I believe this to be a valuable part of the process and for this reason I believe it is important to provide some explanation for my interest in this area of research as well as some of the relevant issues which I reflected upon during the research process.

I kept a reflective journal throughout the research process so that I could record issues, questions and thoughts as they arose. This supported me to monitor my own position within the research and the possible implications this could have at

each stage. I include further references to how this supported me in Chapters Four and Five.

### **3.4.3 Selection of schools**

I chose to focus on mainstream primary schools as they, like specialist provisions, will have a diverse group of children and young people who are entitled to participate in decisions which affect them. I am particularly interested in how those children who have recently been elected onto their school council perceive their role and children's involvement in decision making in school. Table 1 shows information about all three schools involved in the research. The information in rows one to four was obtained from the Department for Education (DfE, 2017) and that in rows five to eight was from my own inspection of schools' websites and discussions with school staff.

When inviting schools to participate, I initially visited their websites to gain an overall impression of the extent to which the schools seemed to value pupil involvement or participation in school. For example, if they had sections of the website specifically for children, or current news of children's achievements and whether these were organised and written or compiled by the children. I searched for school values or mottos which conveyed a sense of the school's projected culture or ethos. In addition to this, I checked the website to see if they had a school council and if so, whether it had its own part of the website and if it appeared to be contributed to by the children or by adults. As I assured the participants that their schools would remain anonymous, I am unable to provide details of specific school values or website content as a whole.

I searched for policies which were about inclusion, pupil voice, participation or similar to see if they were prominent on the site or more difficult to find. After doing this and identifying a range of schools with what I considered to be varying degrees of emphasis on school councils and pupil participation, I contacted the Head teachers by letter and follow up phone call. In order to get in depth views, I chose to work with a small group of schools. Although I contacted seven schools, several of these said that they would like to take part but could not for different reasons, mostly arranging time out of class for the

children involved and having to organise cover for the staff interviews. Some said that with current expectations around academic standards and attainment, they could not afford to have children missing out on the core curriculum. This is an interesting dilemma for researchers who may find access to specific groups difficult due to school or government policy.

Table 2. Information about schools involved in the research.

<b>School information</b>	<b>School A</b>	<b>School B</b>	<b>School C</b>
Type of primary school	LA maintained community	LA maintained community	Church of England Voluntary controlled
Number of pupils on role (2015-16)	195	193	196
% of pupils with Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)	1%	0.5%	0.5%
% pupils eligible for free school meals at any time during last 6 years	16.4.%	20.7%	9.2%
Link to school council on website	Yes	Yes	Yes
School council page maintained or updated by pupils.	Yes	No	Yes
Year groups represented on school council	Year 1- 6 1 girl, 1 boy	Year 1-6 1 girl, 1 boy	Year R-6 1 girl, 1boy

### 3.5 Ethics

I obtained ethical approval for the current research from the University of Exeter Ethics Committee (see appendix 5 for certificate of ethical approval). This

research also adheres to the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics 2014 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

### **3.5.1 Informed consent**

In Phase One of the current research, staff were given research information and consent forms (see appendix 6) which were signed with me just before the interviews took place so that I could answer any questions or provide further explanation. I obtained verbal consent from the two adults who agreed to take part in piloting the staff interviews.

In Phase Two, information and consent forms were sent home to parents and a different version for the school council members was shared with them when we met for the first paired interviews (see appendix 7 for parental information and consent forms and appendix 8 for consent form for school council members). During this time, I explained that I had the Head Teacher's and their parent's /parents' /carer's /carers' permission to invite them to take part. I also emphasised it was their decision and if they did agree, they could change their mind at any point by letting me know. I read through the consent forms with each pair of children and provided further explanation and clarification as needed. We revisited the consent form at the beginning of each group session after that to check that they were still happy to take part. This has been done in previous research with younger children (Harcourt & Hagglund, 2013).

### **3.5.2 Ethical considerations in both phases of the research**

I have outlined some of the issues which were given ethical consideration in both phases of the research in Table 2.

Table 3. Ethical concerns and actions

Ethical concern	Action
Staff may feel unsure about sharing their views about their own or others' views or practice in school.	Remind them of their right to leave and access or have their data destroyed at any point. Reassure them that their data is anonymous and is stored on a password protected laptop. The schools involved remained anonymous in the final write up.
Children may have SEND and find it difficult to access activities in interviews and group sessions	Check with the SENDCo in each school regarding any educational, physical or medical needs that children involved may have. No special educational needs were reported by the SENDCo.
Children change their minds about taking part in the research.	Revisit the informed consent form each week to give children the opportunity to ask any questions or choose to leave the research at any point.
Children make disclosures which are potential safeguarding issues.	As part of revisiting informed consent form each week with the groups, reminded children about confidentiality and of need for me to share information with a trusted adult in school if I think they are unsafe.

## **Chapter Four Phase One**

### **4.1 Method**

#### **4.1.1 Sample**

When selecting participants, I was not looking for a sample of a population as sample implies that it is representative of a wider population and that is not applicable to this kind of exploratory research (Thomas, 2013). I was not seeking to make generalisations from the current research. When selecting participants, I asked the head teacher of each school for a range of teaching and learning support staff in different roles. This was primarily to see the extent to which pupil participation was part of the ethos in the school. I thought a wide range of staff views would give a broader and deeper insight into how pupil participation was regarded beyond what was written in the schools' official policies.

#### **4.1.2 Participants and setting information**

There were 11 members of staff in total across three primary schools in South West England. Participants who agreed to take part were head teachers, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), teachers, teaching assistants and ELSAs (see Table 3 for staff details of each school). While I invited several primary schools to take part in this research initially, I did not get a response from some and others felt it was not possible at that time. This was therefore another factor in deciding which schools would take part. In the end three primary schools agreed to take part: two in both phases of the research and one in the first phase. Given that the second phase involved working with members of the school council in each school each week for five weeks, I felt that two schools' involvement in this phase was sufficient for the aims of this research. Working with staff and pupils during the busy school day required flexibility on both my own and the schools' parts. The staff descriptions are how they described their roles when asked and not my perception of their title. In some cases, staff had more than one role. In schools A and B which took part in both phases of the current research, I interviewed the adult linked to the school



council in both; however, in school C the adult linked to the school council was unavailable so I interviewed another class teacher instead.

Table 4. Staff role and pseudonym information in each school

School A	Pseudonym	School B	Pseudonym	School C	Pseudonym
Head teacher	A-HT	School Council adult and SENCo	BSC& SENDCo	Class teacher and member of the SLT.	C-SLT
Class teacher	A-CT	Class teacher	B-CT	Class teacher and Deputy Head teacher.	C-DH
Teaching assistant (TA) and adult linked to School Council	A-SC&TA	Class teacher and member of Senior Leadership Team (SLT)	B-SLT	Teaching assistant and Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA)	C-TA & ELSA
Class and 1:1 Teaching assistant	A-TA & 1:1 TA	Teaching assistant	B-TA		

#### 4.1.3 Methods of data collection and procedure

I conducted semi-structured interviews with each member of staff in their setting during the summer term. Each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. The interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed and participants were asked if they would like a copy of the transcription to make comments on. One

participant said she would like a copy out of interest in what she said but did not want to make a comment.

#### *4.1.3.1 Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured interviews are widely used in flexible designs (Robson, 2002) and previous research into the views of members of school staff has used semi-structured interviews effectively (Norwich & Kelly, 2006). I decided it was best suited to the current research because it provided the flexibility to cover the topics I wanted to explore, while still giving the participant scope to develop or introduce topics I was not expecting and which were pertinent to them. I had considered using group interviews (Stafford et al., 2003); however, decided against this because people tend to behave differently in groups, such as displaying a 'risky shift phenomenon' when people in groups make riskier decisions than if they were alone. (Thomas, 2013). As the area I am exploring has been associated with staff having different attitudes towards it, I did not want individuals to make bolder statements about something than they would if interviewed individually.

I had also considered focus groups which would see me in the role of facilitator as opposed to taking the lead as I would in a group interview. I decided against this as I did not want a few participants to dominate the discussion with others not feeling able to participate. One of the possible drawbacks of using semi-structured interviews is the potential for participants to only tell me what they want they think I want hear. Given that previous research has found teaching staff to hold a range of views around pupil participation, I decided that individual semi-structured interviews offered a confidential opportunity with an independent researcher to share their views without fear of being judged by colleagues in a group interview or focus group.

#### *4.1.3.2 Interview schedules*

I conducted a pilot interview and made subsequent amendments based on the responses (see appendix 9 for the interview schedule). Notes in my research

journal revealed some uncertainty from the member of staff around my expectations from the interview. To account for this I changed the interview schedule to allow a longer rapport building section at the beginning. I had also reflected upon the potential impact of my own body language on participants. I therefore made notes to myself on the interview schedule to remind me to focus on the person in front of me as well as the questions I wanted to ask.

I wanted the questions to be as open as possible thereby allowing the participant to answer with a range of breadth and depth. I was influenced by the exploratory questions associated with personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955; Beaver, 2011). As I wanted to explore the participants' perceptions, I wanted to ask sufficiently open-ended questions to allow them to feel able to express their views without feeling there was an expectation for a specific response. While acknowledging my role in the creation and interpretation of knowledge during the interview process, I wanted to ensure I was always aware of my own expectations and views regarding the research questions. I found piloting the interviews and my subsequent reflections a very useful part of this process. I recognise that the questions themselves reflect my own expectations to a certain degree.

#### **4.1.4 Data analysis**

I chose to analyse the semi-structured interviews based on the Formal Analysis Process which is a form of thematic analysis. According to Spencer, Ritchie, Ormson, O'Connor & Barnard (2014) thematic analysis is a substantive approach to analysis which is concerned with capturing and interpreting meanings in the data. I chose this model because it goes beyond surface description and while it is based upon the model by Braun and Clarke (2006), it includes an additional step of data summary and display which encourages the researcher to stay close to the data and develop a clear structure so that the steps of analysis can be seen (Spencer et al., 2014). I did not want to lose the meaning I had interpreted in each context (see appendix 10 for a diagram of the process). I found this iterative process enabled me to move between the data and my interpretation in a fluid way, making notes and links as I went along

which then informed my later abstraction and interpretation. I was also prepared for new questions to emerge as part of the data management process.

The Formal Analysis Process involves two main steps: data management and abstraction and interpretation. The themes and categories I developed are unique to the interaction between myself and the participants at a given time. I would therefore not expect the same interpretation if it had been carried out by a different researcher. Therefore, in order for my analysis to be assessed in terms of its value, I outline step by step how I got from the transcribed interview data to the eventual themes.

I kept an analytic log which started during the data collection phase and continued throughout the analytic process so that I could keep track of my thoughts and notes for later in the analysis process. This enabled me to retain as much of the context and meaning as possible so that I could reflect upon and interpret it during the final phase.

## **Data analysis procedure**

### *Familiarisation*

I transcribed and read through the semi-structured interviews several times to gain an overview of the substantive content and note anything interesting or unexpected in the data. This helped ensure that the initial topics I identified were grounded in and supported by the data.

### *Constructing an initial thematic framework*

Having identified possible topics and groupings in the previous stage, I then developed themes and sub-themes which formed the initial thematic framework (see Table 5). I was mindful of not imposing themes on the data but at this stage they were based on the research questions, initial aims and areas which seemed to emerge from several readings of the transcripts.

Table 5. Initial thematic framework

<b>1. Participation in school</b>	<b>2. Involvement in decision making</b>	<b>3. School council</b>
During lessons Ethos Staff involvement Parents Rights Pupil voice Inclusion SEND Groups in school Wider community Opportunities Reasons for school	Decisions for children Adult response Children's rights Lip service Gaining views Appropriate issues Sensible ideas Teaching and learning Events	Effectiveness Desire to prioritise Other pupils Purpose Processes involved Communication Perceived benefits Time Role of adults Children involved

### *Indexing and sorting*

I used the initial thematic framework to index (code) the data using Nvivo. I chose to use this computer program because it enabled me to go and back forth between data which helped to remind me of the data extracts' original context. It also enabled me to revise the framework more easily while still also keeping each extract in its original location. Table 6 shows an example of coded data using the initial thematic framework.

Table 6. Sample of data from different participants originally indexed under theme of Role of adults

**A -CT**

Mmm.. I think it's particularly nice for them to feel that even the HT and other staff are listening to what they say and people do listen to that and then act accordingly

...but the important thing is that she has asked their opinions and that she has listened to it and I suppose obviously as the responsible adult at the end of the day she's got to make the final decision based on that so

**A -SC & TA**

...but she's good at that, she does do that. Cos I have heard the kids say certain things and as long as they have been explained, and they know why and that's fine and they are quite happy to go back and say whatever, so.

but I suppose it probably then needs to make sure you have got somebody like Mrs XXX {HT} who can then sort things out (laughs)

*Reviewing data extracts*

This is an important part of the process as it involves reading through the indexed data and checking that the data fits within each sub-theme. During this process, I adapted the initial thematic framework and created a revised version. Figures 2 and 3 show some of the changes I made having reviewed the data and the subsequent revised thematic framework.

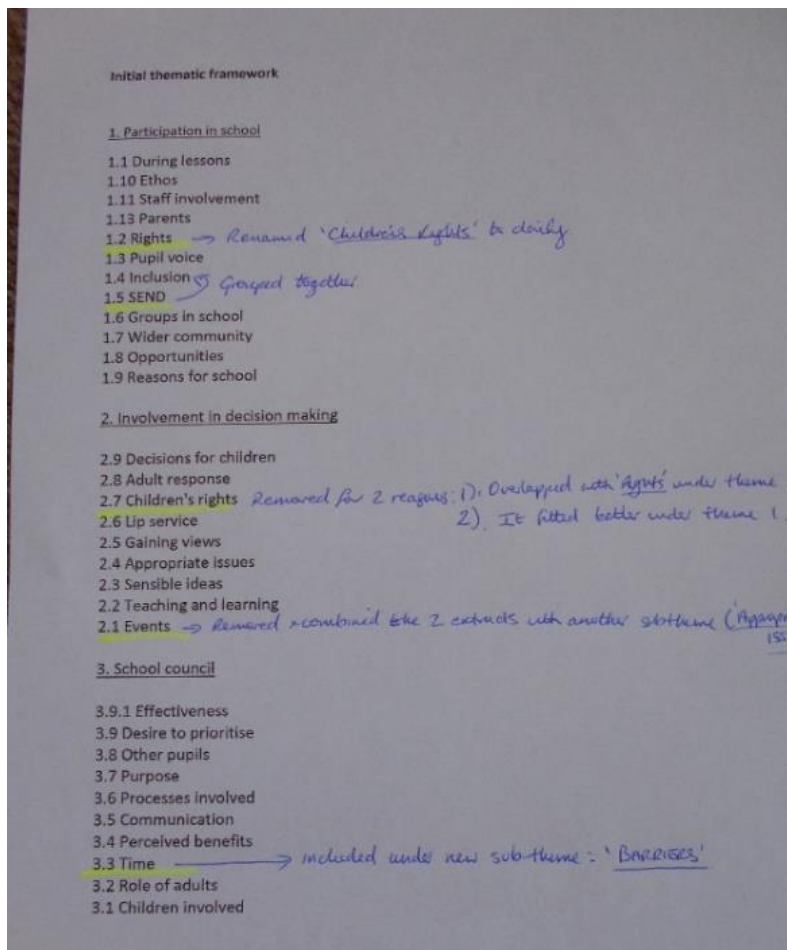


Figure 2. Process of refining the initial thematic framework

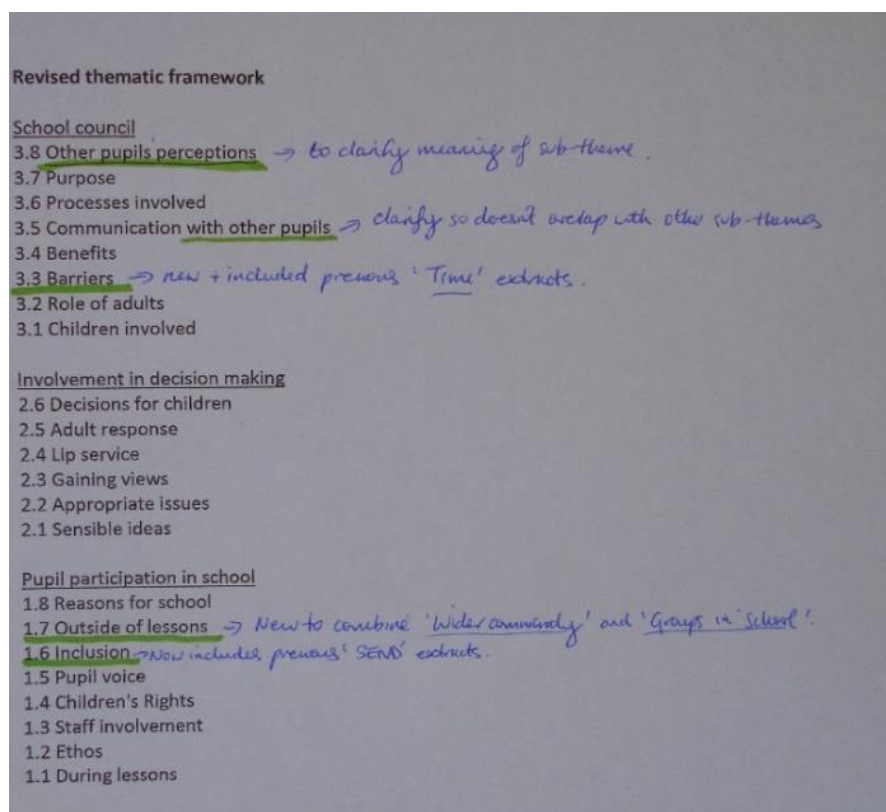


Figure 3. Sample of some of the changes made to the initial framework.

Table 7 Reviewed thematic framework (Phase One)

School council	Involvement in decision making	Pupil participation in school
Other pupils' perceptions Purpose Processes involved Communication with other pupils Benefits Barriers Role of adults Children involved	Decisions for children Adult response Lip service Gaining views Appropriate issues Sensible ideas	Reasons for school Outside of lessons Inclusion Pupil voice Children's Rights Staff involvement Ethos During lessons

### *Data summary and display*

In the final stage of the data management stage, which is based on the work of Miles and Huberman (1984), I created matrices for each participant under each theme and its sub-themes showing the essence of what I understood each person to be saying about that theme. Table 8 provides an example of a matrix for a sub-theme. In some cases I wrote data summaries in order to capture the essence of what was being said while being careful not to interpret too much at this stage. I was careful to find a balance between summarising and retaining enough original language of the participant so as not to lose the context. In other cases, which were mostly short phrases, I paraphrased their comments because I thought that summarising such short extracts would not retain the original meaning. I discuss some of the implications this process has for my interpretation in the discussion section of this chapter.



Table 8. Section of framework matrix for sub-themes in School Council theme

	<b>3.1 School Council members</b>	<b>3.2 Role of adults</b>	<b>3.3 Barriers</b>	<b>3.4 Benefits</b>
<b>School A HT</b>	Not sure the 4year olds would really, they could be there in body, but whether they would be there in understanding.	<p>The commitment is, putting in the time, every week, when you have got a million other things to do, they'll come and go, is school council on? On my way? (clicks fingers)</p> <p>I have got to now do some training with them</p> <p>For some (OTHER STAFF) it would be the last thing on their minds, teachers need to remember to give you that some space each week, so we might be good at doing it one way but sometimes not the other way</p>	time in school is absolutely tight as	school councils are, yeah, I couldn't imagine not having it really

### *Constructing categories and identifying linkages between categories*

Constructing categories involves trying to understand 'what is happening' within a theme or a sub-theme (Spencer et al., 2014). I read through the data extracts for each sub-theme taking note of the range of perceptions, views, experiences and behaviours which have been labelled as part of a theme. I was then able to identify elements and the dimensions within them. By distinguishing the dimensions of an element, I could derive the basic theme that highlights what the variation is about. I also checked for linkages between categories and noted these for discussion. Table 9 shows an extract of the category construction process.

Table 9. Extract of data summaries, elements, elements across data set and dimensions for each sub-theme within *Pupil participation in school*

Data summaries for 1.1 During lessons	Detected elements	Detected elements across the data set	Dimensions
<b>School A</b> <b>AHT</b> <i>Not explicitly discussed</i>		-Opportunities to work with other children (A-HT) - Talking partner work (C-DH) - Interacting within the lesson (C -CT&SLT).	Pupils working together
<b>School A</b> <b>ACT</b> Lots of opportunities for working as a group, working with a partner, sharing ideas.  Everyone is joining in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunities to work with other children</li> </ul>	-Joining in activities (A-TA & 1:TA) - Ownership over learning (B- SC&SENCO) -Self assessment (B- SC&SENCO) -Putting hand up in lesson	Pupil responsibility
<b>School A</b> <b>A SC&amp;TA</b> <i>Not explicitly discussed</i>			
<b>School A</b> <b>TA &amp; 1:1TA</b> joining in with whatever is happening, their learning or project or whatever is going on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joining in activities</li> </ul>	-Child-led interests (B-CT) -Children part of the lesson (C-CT&SLT)	Pupil choice
<b>School B</b> <b>SC &amp; SENCo</b> Definitely children having ownership of their learning. Um, and understanding of their targets and playing an important part in the assessment of their own learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ownership over learning.</li> <li>Self assessment</li> </ul>	- Flexibility in planning lessons (B-CT) - Structured opportunities for all children to join in  -Contributing ideas and answers (C-CT&SLT)	Preparation required  Partnership

As I have moved from description to explanation, this last phase is an attempt to explain what is going on in the data. This step involved analysing the data in different ways and from different angles until I found explanations which seemed to be a best possible fit for the data. I have taken explicit explanations provided in the data when developing my own implicit explanations which I have drawn from the body of existing knowledge in this area. I have presented these in the findings and discussion section which follow.

## 4.2 Findings

### 4.2.1 Summary of categories relating to each area

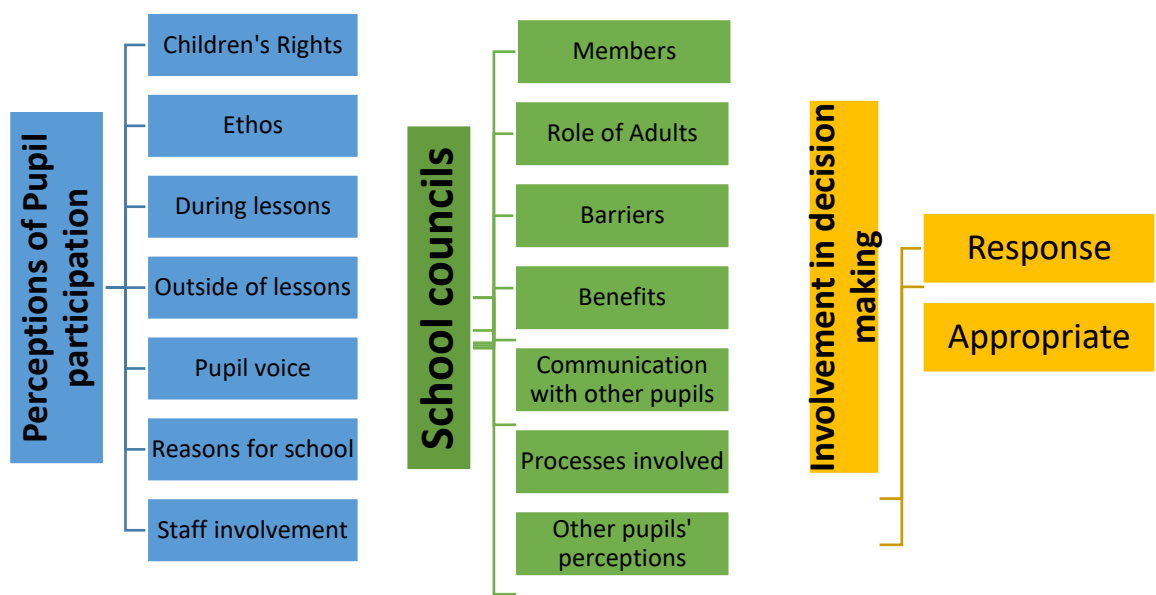


Figure 4. Categories across entire sample.

## 4.2.2 Construction of categories

This section shows how the categories and their components were constructed. The components and their sub-components within each category are presented along with illustrative quotes from members of staff across all three schools. My own interpretive comments are also included to highlight the depth and complexity of their views. I have distinguished the components which have sub-components by representing the data in a tabular form. For the categories which have components, I have provided examples of representative quotes from all three schools.

### 4.2.2.1 Categories, components and sub-components relating to *Perceptions of pupil participation*.

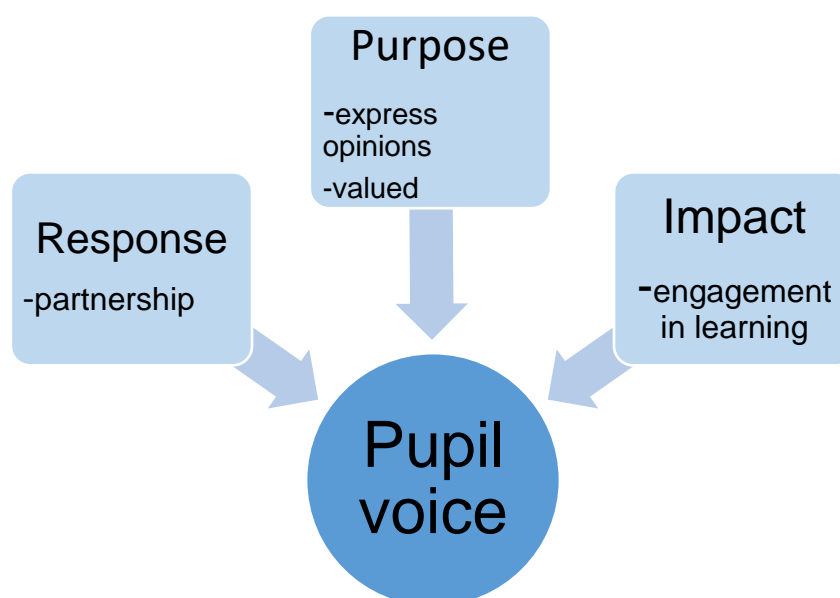


Figure 5. Pupil voice category and its components and sub-components

The pupil voice category highlighted staff's understanding of this term and the extent to which they valued it in schools. This is explored further in the discussion section of this chapter.

Table 10. Purpose component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
express opinions	<i>I suppose it's children having a right to air their opinions.</i>	A-CT
valued	<i>So you are hearing their voice and you're writing that down, valuing it, acknowledging.</i>  <i>Trying to make sure that all the children really value the fact that they have a voice and that voice is heard.</i>  <i>..people will listen to them and take those opinions on board.</i>	A-HT  A-HT  A-CT

Table 11. Impact component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
Engagement in learning	<i>It's of the highest importance really, if they don't feel involved you're not going to engage children as well as you could and they're not going to learn well.</i>  <i>I'm quite interested in pupil voice meaning things like the children being involved in planning some of their curriculum.</i>	B-SLT  B-CT

Table 12. Response component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
Partnership	<i>Giving them a voice and giving them a say at whatever age then you can work together can't you to get a good outcome.</i>	C-TA & ELSA

The *During Lessons* category emphasised the partnership between teachers and pupils during lessons. Some staff reported that they wanted pupils to participate in decisions involving what they learned but that this had to be within reason.

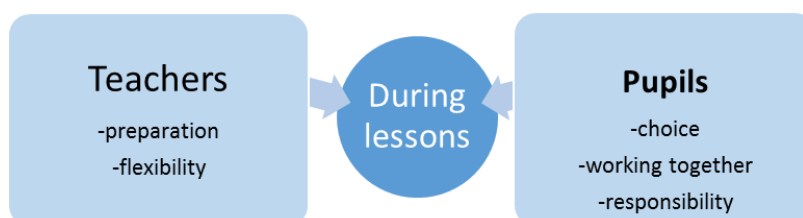


Figure 6. During lessons category and its components and sub-components

Table 13. Teachers component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
preparation	<p><i>We go through that early years perspective to planning their learning.</i></p> <p><i>Making sure all children ...are given the right structures and support within a lesson so that everyone can participate.</i></p>	<p>B-CT</p> <p>C-SLT</p>
flexibility	<i>To be flexible enough to go with the children's interests</i>	B-CT

Table 14. Pupils component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
Responsibility	<i>Children having ownership over their own learning and an understanding of their targets and playing an important part in the assessment of their own learning.</i>	B-SLT
Working together	<p><i>Lots of opportunities for working as a group, working with a partner, sharing ideas.</i></p> <p><i>It's not just you doing the teaching, they're part of the lesson, they're giving you ideas and answers</i></p>	<p>A-CT</p> <p>C-SLT</p>

The *Staff involvement* category relates to the nature and extent of their involvement in children's participation in school. The variation reported within schools is explored further in the discussion section of this chapter.

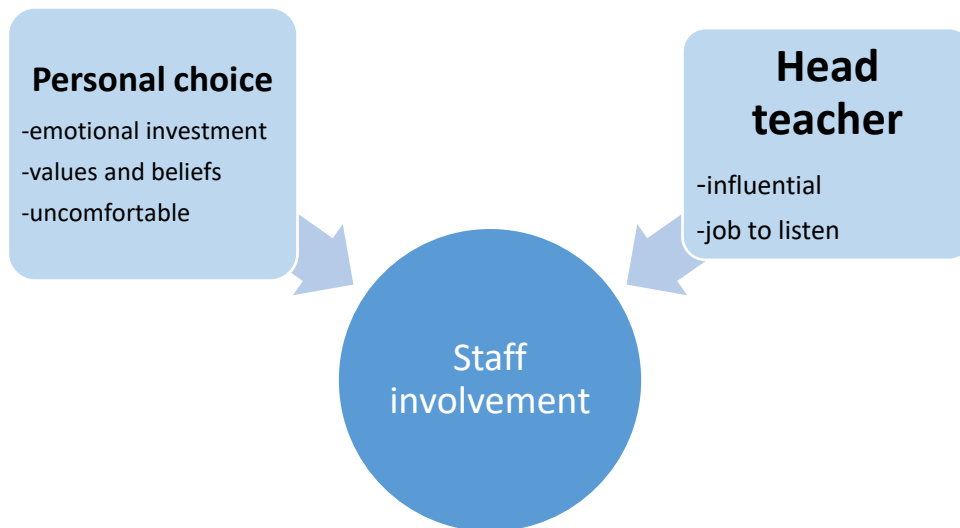


Figure 7. Staff involvement category and its components and sub-components

Table 15. Personal choice component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
Emotional investment	<i>It is my job to worry, I get paid to do that.</i>	B-SC& SENCo
Uncomfortable	<i>You've got certain classes that aren't as inclusive as others and that's partly the teachers just put the barrier up and doesn't want to involve the children because it's out of their comfort zone I guess.</i>	C-DH
Values and beliefs	<i>It's a personal issue really rather than anything else.</i>  <i>I think it really depends on what kind of HT you have at the top and teachers as well, whether they like children to be able to say. Some ..it's my way or the highway and others you know value their opinions.</i>	C-DH  C- SLT



Table 16. Head teacher component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
influential	<p><i>It's naturally come down because the HT is very open and allows them to have a say.</i></p> <p><i>The HT is very inclusive of all of the children and that has definitely in the last couple of years had a big impact on the rest of the teachers.</i></p>	C-SLT
Job to listen	<i>Well I suppose she's (HT) got to, she's got to take into account lots of views of you know parents and staff and whoever else is involved.</i>	A-CT

The *Reasons for school* category highlighted staffs' wider world view in relation to the purpose of education. Staff reported a range of reasons for pupils to attend school.

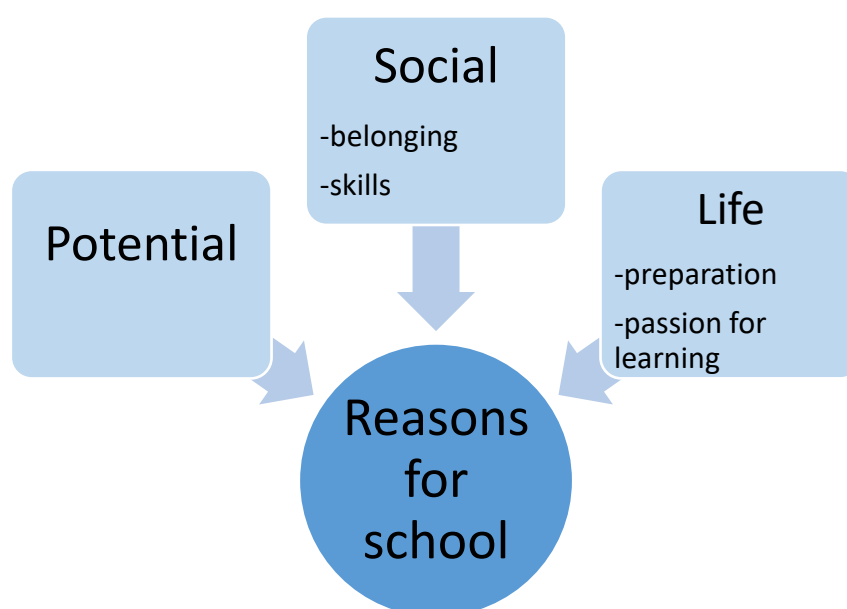


Figure 8. Reasons for school and its components and sub-components

Table 17. Social component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
Belonging	<i>To be part of and feel part of something</i>	C-TA & ELSA
Skills	<p><i>They learn social parameters, they learn how to deal with other people</i></p> <p><i>Social skills are for me one of the main, main things that you have to learn when you are at school, it's so important.</i></p>	<p>A-TA &amp; 1:1TA</p> <p>B-CT</p>

Table 18. Life component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
Preparation	<p><i>To equip them for the world that is going to be unleashed on or is going to be unleashed upon them... you're giving them the skills by which they will make their way through life.</i></p> <p><i>Basically preparing them for all the next steps in life.</i></p>	<p>B-SLT</p> <p>C-DH</p>
Passion for learning	<p><i>I think we are, we're not educators in the academic sense, it is about people who just love children and want to give them the passion, to learn as opposed to be taught.</i></p> <p><i>Just to encourage them and give them a positive experience towards learning so that they become life-long learners.</i></p>	<p>B-SC &amp; SENCo</p> <p>B-CT</p>

Table 19. Potential component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<i>..to be challenged and reach their full potential really..find the person they are destined to be.</i>	C-SLT

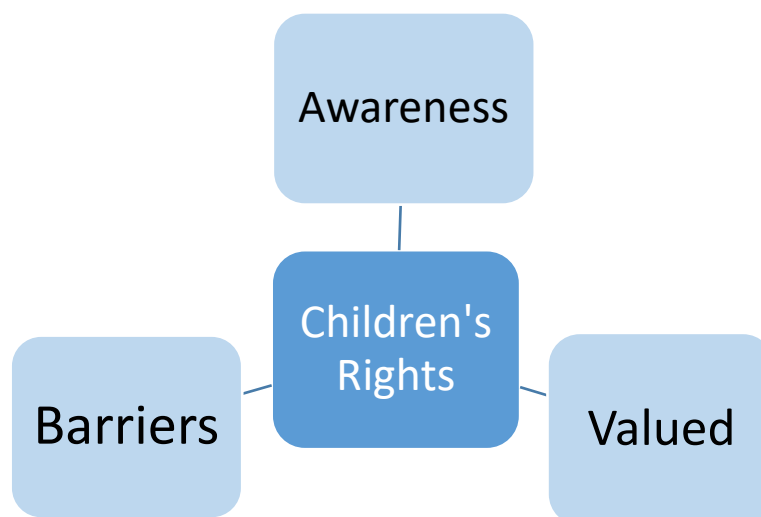


Figure 9. Children's rights and its components

### **Awareness**

I've heard of it but I don't know what's in it(C-DH).

I don't know much about it necessarily (C-SLT).

I am aware of it but I can't quote anything. Or is it rights regardless? No rights respecting...(B-TA).

We are a Rights Respecting School which is based on the Unicef, um...articles (A-HT).

### **Barriers**

One member of senior staff commented about the financial implications on school strategies:

We were looking at the Rights Respecting Schools, moving into next year but be honest the finance is so huge we are not going to be able to because you have to pay for the assessment and that's nearly £5000 so...but we will implement strategies perhaps from that (B-SC & SENDCO).

### **Valued**

Very worth doing I think those children's rights, and if they're not done explicitly they are alluded to in a variety of forms, you know you're right to be part of the school... (B-SLT)

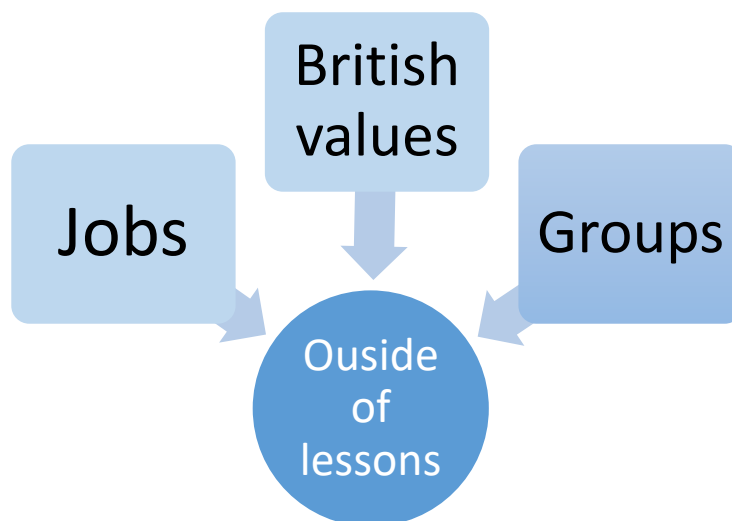


Figure 10. Outside of lessons and its components

### **Jobs**

We have got lots of um, little teams of children that organise and help things in various ways... (A-TA &1:1TA).

Jobs range from ringing the bell, delivering registers em...Year 6 children also do sports ambassadors, they get training for that (B-SLT).

### British values

The idea of British values, that children are now having to become more aware of nowadays that have been brought from the government (B-SLT).

### Groups

I think we've got a school council, we have groups of many different sorts, there are a lot of opportunities for them to be heard, have their say... (B-TA).

It's multi-faceted from school council, rights respecting, eco rangers, house representatives... (A-HT).

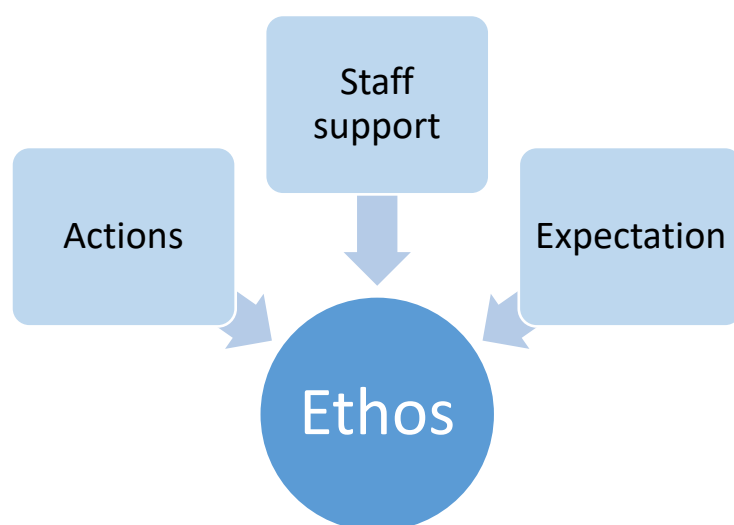


Figure 11. Ethics and its components

The comments from staff in all three schools were mainly positive about their school's positive ethos. When I consulted my reflective journal, I was struck by the enthusiastic and animated body language that had accompanied many staff members' comments about the importance of creating a positive atmosphere in school. Staff reported that establishing a sense of belonging to school was valued and encouraged in their setting. This category is discussed further in the Discussion section of this chapter.

### **Actions**

In every part of a school environment, every part of the school day.

Making decisions and being seen to be um their opinion mattering (A-HT).

Particularly with the older children, you know that they're given the chance to participate and also form policies, in some cases.(B-SLT).

Having good learning behaviours, really and these go through the school. And this I think is one strong aspect of participation that's going on in school (C-DH).

### **Staff support**

I do like pupils being involved in what they learn (B-CT).

I think if it's in the ethos, who cares if you're waving the flag (referring to Rights Respecting Schools Award) as long as we know we are doing it! (B-SC & SENDCO).

Pupil participation is a priority it has been in the ethos here for a long time and it's so embedded that the kind of data pressures haven't squeezed it out yet (B-SLT).

Feelings are very positive towards it (School Council) and people are keen to raise their profile and get them involved in more things (A-CT).

## Expectation

There's an expectation that they've all got to participate in everything (C-DH).

Children are very much encouraged to be part of our school (A-SC & TA)

The comments around inclusion highlighted a range of interpretations of the term inclusion. While it was not the aim of the current research to examine staff's understanding of inclusion, I thought it was interesting to note and variation and contradictions in relation to this construct. Findings from this category together with those from the *Appropriate* category are discussed further in the discussion of this chapter and in the final chapter in relation to future research.

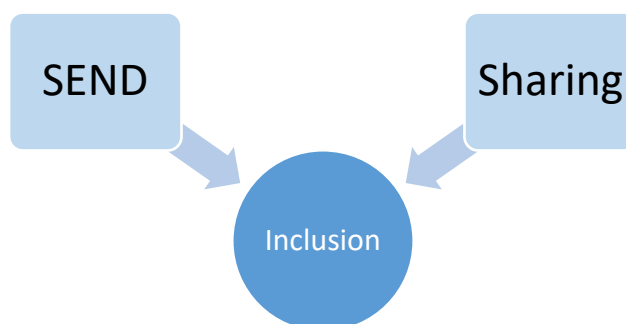


Figure 12. Inclusion and its components

## SEND

Eh, yeh, inclusive you're not just talking about special educational needs children you're talking about all children? (C-SLT).

The children are doing all of the participation so everyone is completely included and catered for, their needs are catered for. Mmm in terms of special needs, we have all tried our best to include them (C-SLT).

## Sharing

Here they all do whatever their ability. I think their abilities, in sharing ideas doesn't pose a problem (B-TA).

4.2.2.2 Categories, components and sub-components relating to *Involvement in decision making*.

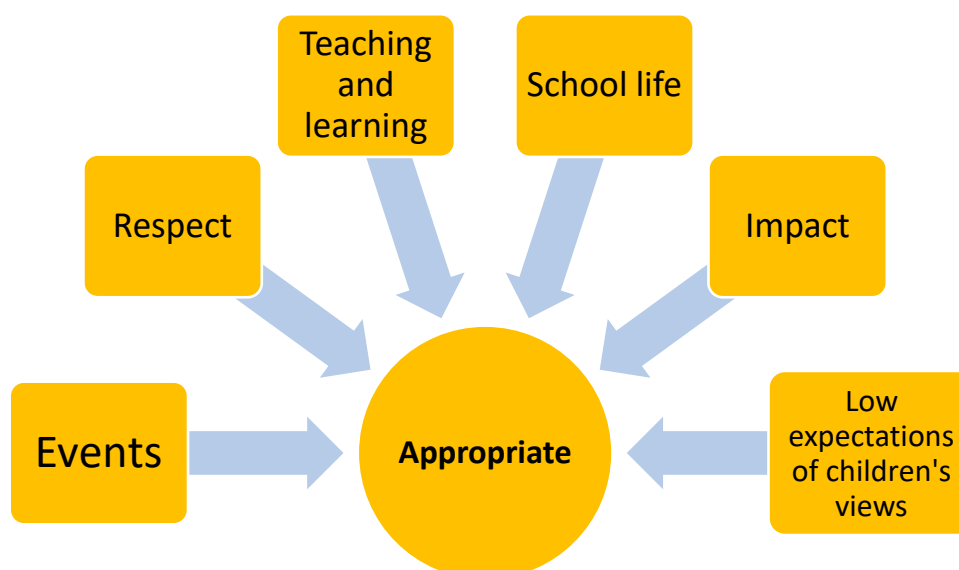


Figure 13. Appropriate and its components

## Events

Things that are a school event, that are planned are appropriate (A-HT)



## **Respect**

Some staff reported a need to be polite as if it were a condition they had to adhere to in order to be listened to.

It can't always be acted upon, we'd be bowing down to their views all the time (B-SC & SENDCo).

They can be taught to do that in a polite way....as long as they are doing it in a respectful way I don't think there are things that they shouldn't have a say about ...if they've come with something and you have to be polite back again(C-SLT)..

There is a way to do it, I think if children are taught that and that feedback is important but there is a right way and a right time to do it, I think the teachers will accept that (A-SC & TA).

At the end of the day they are children so they will say some things that you think 'Ok...random!' (C-SLT).

They should be able to politely put their views across within the school day (C-SLT).

## **Teaching and learning**

Definitely about the learning. About their environment they are learning within. Perhaps suggestions about what could be in the classrooms (B-CT).

I actually really want to know, I'm really interested in that, in what they think about me as a teacher (B-SLT).

I do think they should have a say in their class you know what they want to learn. (C-TA & ELSA).

I don't think anyone would take it personally (A-HT).

## **School life**

Things like playtime, things that affect them really (C-TA & ELSA)

They definitely input on clubs, like what clubs because the teachers tend to decide that (C-SLT).

## Impact

I think they probably feel more ownership of something if they have a say in it (A SC&TA).

## Low expectations of children's views

You think that maybe they would just come up with things you wouldn't want, you know a load of rubbish, but actually some of it was quite informative, if they know the boundaries, they actually can come up with some sensible and it was surprising (A-CT)

I mean if we left everything up to children then it wouldn't be very safe place would it? (A-CT)

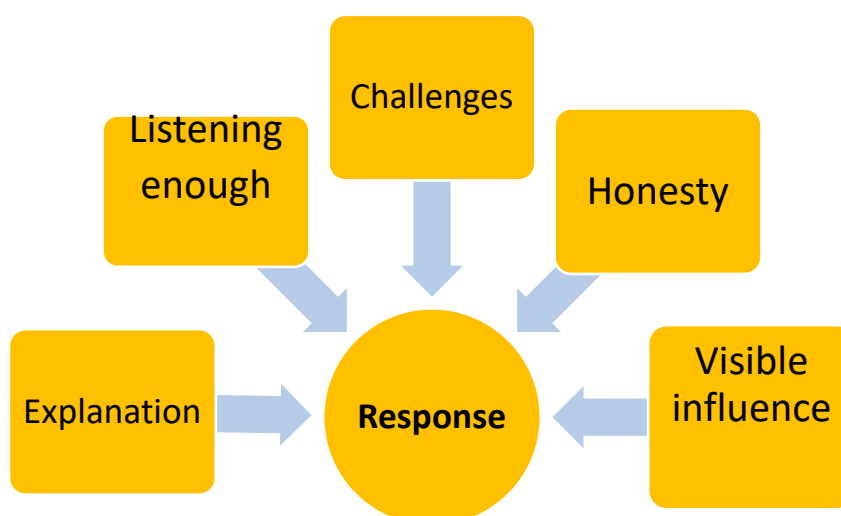


Figure 14. Response and its components

This category is discussed further in relation to the findings of Phase Two in Chapter Six.

Table 20. Explanation component

<b>Examples of quotes from staff members</b>	<b>Participant</b>
<i>I do think the children then need to, need to be told why. Yeah, otherwise they will feel they are not being listened to.</i>	B-TA
<i>It's just as important to make sure they understand the decision that they haven't made, that's participation in a way isn't it?... I think everybody in school will try and make sure that they mm that they understand why that decision was made.</i>	B-SLT

Table 21. Listening enough component

<b>Examples of quotes from staff members</b>	<b>Participant</b>
<i>But the important thing is that she has asked their opinions and that she has listened to it and I suppose as the responsible adult at the end of the day she has to make her decision based on that</i>	A-CT

Table 22. Challenges component

<b>Examples of quotes from staff members</b>	<b>Participant</b>
I think that a lot of schools do it as a tick box to be perfectly honest.	C-SLT
I saw, some people handing it out like a tick list, 'get the job done, XX (HT) wants that in'.	A-HT

Table 23. Visible influence component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<p><i>I try and hear their voice and represent them in some way...it would be through school council but you know you are talking about one direction and not the other so well, you have made me think, do the masses hear it?</i></p> <p><i>Yeh I am not sure if it gets back to the children...</i></p>	A-HT

Table 24. Honesty component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<p><i>I think what I'm saying here is the <b>illusion</b> that they've taken part, is it kidology, they can't choose their own HT but certainly the illusion that they have been involved I think...that sounds really disrespectful to children doesn't it?</i></p> <p><i>In previous years it was a bit, it was just humouring them almost.</i></p>	<p>B-SLT</p> <p>A-TA &amp; 1:1TA</p>

4.2.2.3 The following categories and their components are related to **School Councils**.

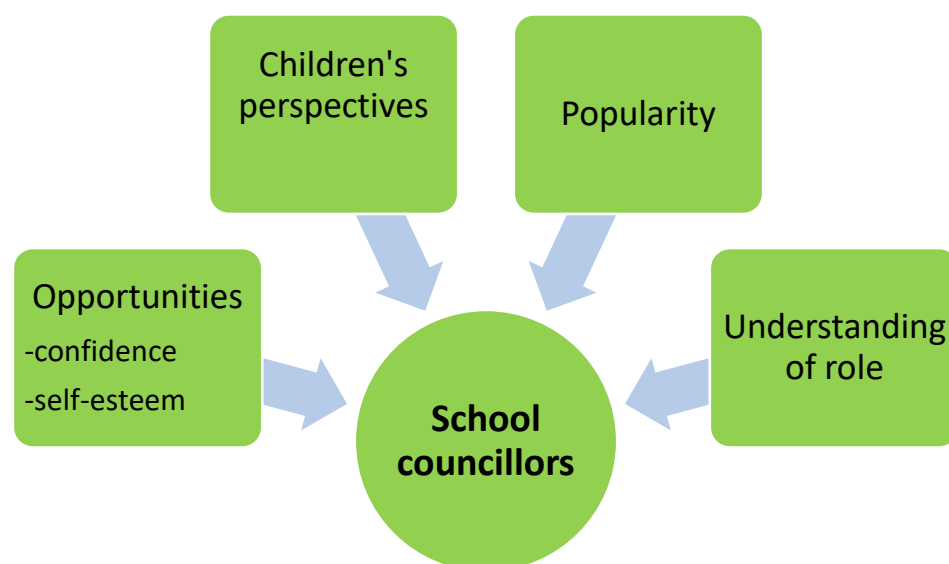


Figure 15. School councillors and its components and sub-components

Table 25. Opportunities component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
confidence	<i>Some really rise to the occasion</i>	B-SLT
Self-esteem	<i>It's good for the children in that sometimes the ones who aren't always the first at sport and the popular ones they sometimes put their hand up for this and it's nice to see those children being involved.</i>	C-TA & ELSA

Table 26. Children's perspective component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<i>They're coming at it from a very different angle than we are aren't they?</i>	B-SLT

Table 27. Popularity component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<i>It's normally the really confident children who end up being on the school council. Mainly just because of the politics of the classroom.</i>	A-TA & 1:1TA
<i>it tends to be the more charismatic children that tend to get voted on.</i>	B-SC & SENCo

Table 28. Understanding of role component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<i>...others find it trickier even though they know what the role is beforehand</i>	A -SC & TA

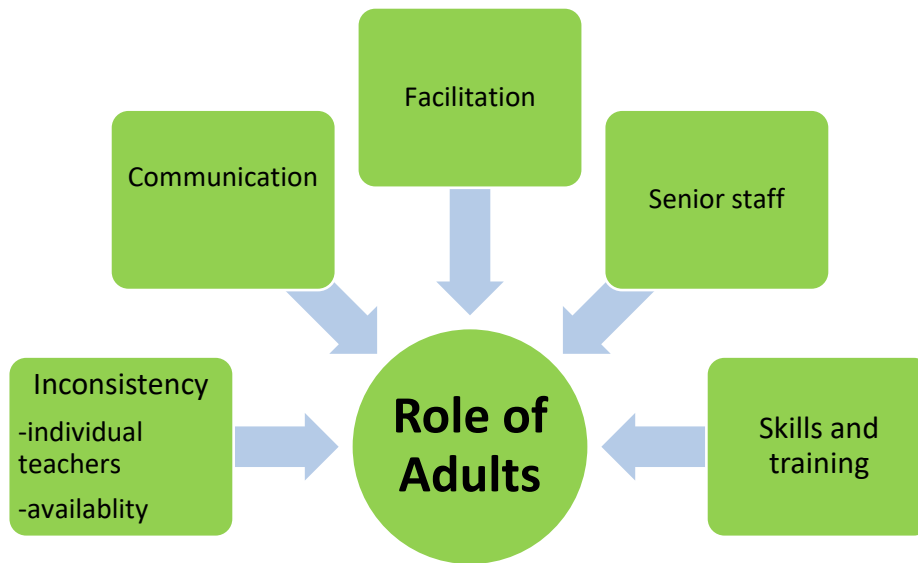


Figure 16. Role of adults and its components and sub-components

The role of adults was widely commented upon in the current research and the relevance of the findings in relation to this category are discussed further in the discussion section of this chapter.

Table 29. Inconsistency component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
Individual teachers	<i>For some staff, it would be the last thing on their minds..</i>	A-HT
	<i>I don't think the adult leading has the motivation to do it or the enthusiasm</i>	C-DH
availability	<i>It's about the staff member being available.</i>	B-SLT

Table 30. Communication component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<i>There could be more in briefing, they could say the SC think that..</i>	C-TA & ELSA
<i>The clarity of the person who's leading that has got to be the biggest enabler I think.</i>	B-SLT

Table 31. Facilitation component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<i>The adult's got to lead it, has got to be the one to call the meetings because they're not in a position where the children are going to.</i>	C-DH
<i>If there's not time for an adult to be there, they can't do it (have a meeting)</i>	B-SLT
<i>I mean maybe help them to do whatever they want to do but not actually doing that much cause they have a chair, a vice chair and secretary</i>	B-SC & SENCo

Table 32. Senior staff component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<i>The commitment is putting in the time, every week, when you have got a million other things to do</i>	A-HT
<i>You need someone at the top to make something happen</i>	B-SC & SENCo



Table 33. Skills and training component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<i>I have got to do now some training with them</i>	A-HT
<i>I write minutes of them, yes. No fancy dictaphones!</i>	B-SC & SENCo

Among the benefits of school councils identified by staff, those relating to democracy and developing a sense of responsibility are expressed within the following category of *Benefits*.

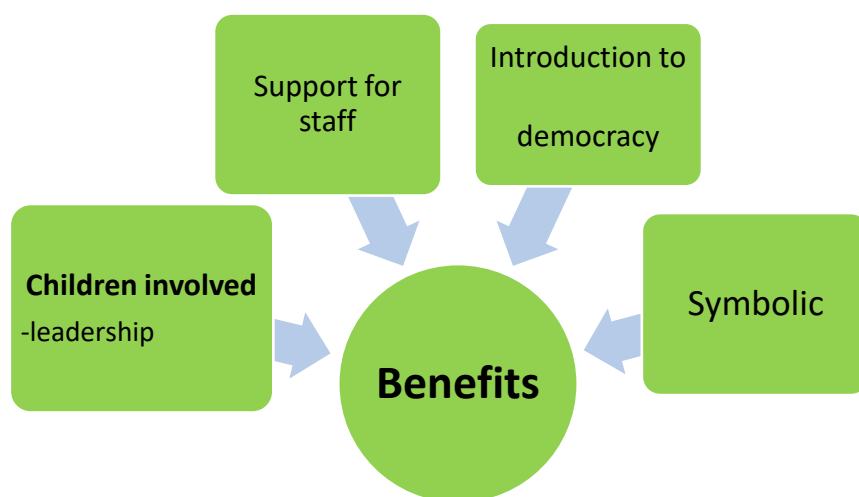


Figure 17. Benefits and its components and sub-components

Table 34. Children involved component

Sub-component	Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
Personal development	<p><i>It just sort of encourages independence.</i></p> <p><i>They are given, not a little bit of power but a bit more responsibility than the rest, it does empower them and make them feel they are a little involved in the management.</i></p> <p><i>They would probably do more if they got more responsibility</i></p> <p><i>It gives them a bit of a sense of leadership within themselves.</i></p>	<p>A-CT</p> <p>B-SC &amp; SENCo</p> <p>C-DH</p> <p>C- TA &amp; ELSA</p>

Table 35. Supports staff component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<i>When I've got issues or dilemmas I throw it into the school council forum and they are really good at solving issues and problems.</i>	B-SC & SENCo

Table 36. Democracy component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<i>It's a nice way of introducing things like democracy and how is country is run.</i>	

Table 37. Symbolic component

Examples of quotes from staff members	Participant
<i>The children (in SC) know their views are being listened to and I think they get a lot from that</i>	B-TA
<i>You see a complete change in personality because they know they are popular. You have physical evidence</i>	B-SC & SENCo
<i>They wear lanyards as well as their little badges, so you know, they feel a bit special</i>	B-SC & SENCo

The role and involvement of younger children is discussed in the context of possible future research in Chapter Seven.

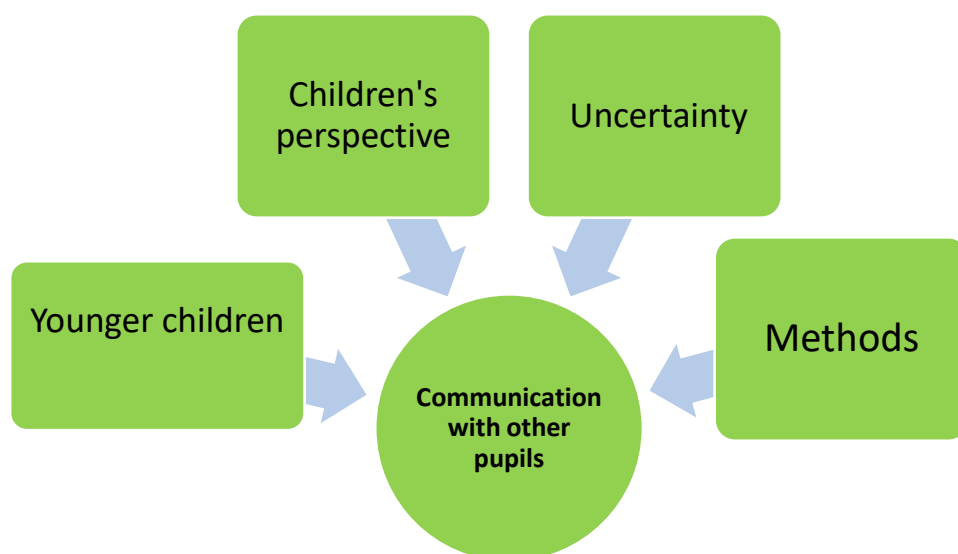


Figure 18. Communication with other children and its components

### Younger children

I am not sure that younger children are 100% aware (B-SC & SENDCo)

## **Children's perspective**

The others do seem to listen to them because it's another child telling them what to do not necessarily another adult (B-CT).

I think children can say that's a silly suggestion you can't have that, and they have said that. They are quite good at saying those sorts of things because obviously they have been chosen. They know here that it does mean something because they see the fruit you know, they often stand up in front of assembly and explain a decision that's been made or something that we've bought because of the SC so they know, they know it works. (B-SLT).

## **Uncertainty**

They have some sort of box for something but what was that for? (A-CT).

If you were to ask someone in class what SC are working on at the moment I don't know if they would particularly be able to say (A-CT).

There is a box somewhere or there was... (A-TA&1:1 TA).

## **Methods**

We have a board up there and they write on the board who they are, it has a pouch thing, people put their ideas in... they have a webpage as well (A – TA & 1:1 TA).

The school council decide the question they want, they have it written down, they take it back to class, they have a ten-minute discussion, they have their ideas and write it down. (A-SC&TA).

Where staff sometimes felt unsure about some aspects of the school council, they almost all knew about the processes and procedures involved in electing members of council. The possible implications and interpretations of this are explored in more detail in the discussion section of the current chapter.

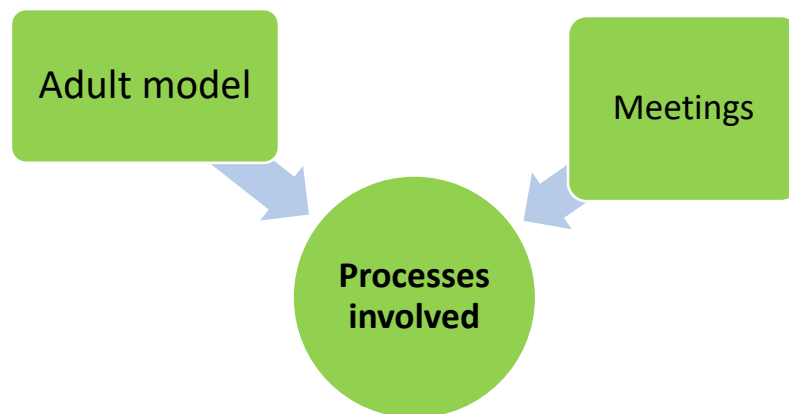


Figure 19. Processes involved and its components

### **Adult model**

They tend to only talk about what charities we raise money for rather than things that are actually happening around school. Its more event based (C-SLT).

The children take it very seriously and they come back with their clipboards and their questions.. (A-CT).

### **Meetings**

They should meet every half term so that they generally talk about school council but there tends to be a meeting when there's something to talk about if you know what I mean (C-DH).

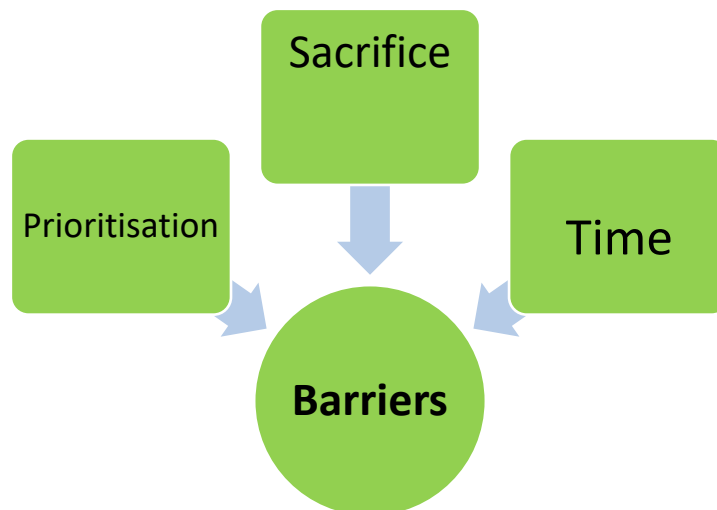


Figure 20. Barriers and its components

### **Prioritisation**

One member of staff commented on how it has recently not appeared to be a priority in school:

I think it's kind of fallen a little under the wayside this year so yeh.. (C-DH).

### **Sacrifice**

I mean a lot of it is done in lunchtimes and children give up their own time as well so I think that's a huge barrier. (B-SLT).

### **Time**

I think it's about time again, time is an issue in school. (B-CT).

It's probably something we'd all love to get our teeth into but no one's got the time so... (C-CT&SLT).

It's time, it's always time isn't it (A-TA & 1:1TA).

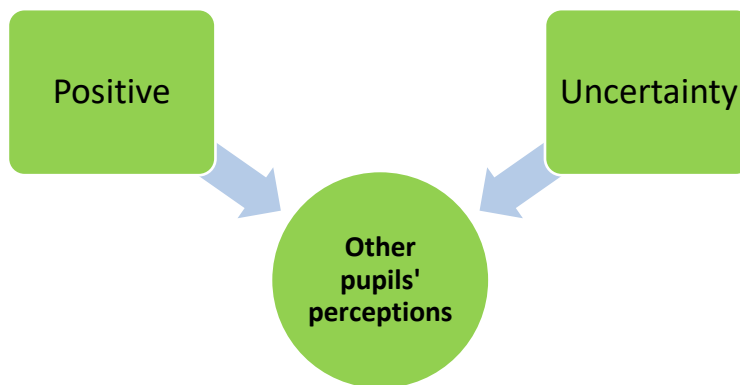


Figure 21. Other pupils' perceptions and its components

### **Positive**

They always seem quite keen to put ideas forward (A-CT).

Oh yes it's very popular (C-DH).

I think they think they are important and I think they know it's a way of getting their um opinions represented (B-TA).

### **Uncertainty**

To be honest I don't think half the school realises that it goes on (C-SLT &CT).

I don't think they would naturally go to one of those and say 'I've got an idea for a school council meeting' (C-DH).

## **4.3 Discussion**

### **4.3.1 Overview of section**

In this section I discuss the findings in relation to the first two research questions. The sub-headings used are based on the categories identified during analysis. I will identify any patterns I noticed as well as anything I found surprising and unexpected in the data.

### **4.3.2 What are the views of members of staff about pupils' participation in decision making in school?**

#### Suitable areas for children to participate in

Some of the staff interviewed appear to have clear boundaries around what is appropriate for pupils to be involved in decision making about and what is not. In explicitly identifying topics they considered to be or not be appropriate, the used terms such as 'obviously...', 'certainly...', suggesting that there is a clear line that children's views should not be sought. Fundraising events, improving the school playground and school meals were examples of appropriate topics. This provides support for previous research which argues that children and young people's involvement in event-based decisions, such as charity fundraising, is more straight forward to organise and does not challenge the power status quo in schools between staff and pupils. This could potentially defer their involvement in decisions which involve them in such as teaching and learning (Cross et al., 2014).

#### Individuals' expectations and identity

Some staff from different schools expressed a need for children to share their views 'politely' or 'respectfully' if they are to be considered by adults.

It's a nice environment where they've learnt to politely put their views across' (C-SLT).

'It's a personal issue really rather than anything else (A-CT).



This response highlights the power of adults to impose their own values and beliefs in making pupil's participation in decision making being conditional in that it must meet their own personal standards. This is evidence of the need for a shared understanding among staff as to how and why pupils should be able to participate. It also highlights one of the challenges of the school environment in which there is a clear hierarchy and there can be a perception amongst staff that they are working for children or on their behalf (Cook-Sather, 2002). To embrace a culture in which staff are being asked to work with children and involve them in all decisions which affect them may be challenging. It could be that pupils having too much of a say contradicts individuals' conceptualisation of childhood:

At the end of the day they are children so they will say some things that make you think 'Ok, random!' (C-SLT).

or could pose a threat to their professional identity which is that of working to protect children:

I mean if we left everything up to children then it wouldn't be very safe place would it? (A-CT).

It can't always be acted upon, we'd be bowing down to their views all the time (B-SLT).

There also appeared to be inconsistency within schools as to how inclusive classes were in terms of pupil involvement in decision making in class. Some staff reported that it was very much down to the individual teacher as to what children were invited to comment on or participate in. It was also seen as a tick box exercise by some in that it was another initiative to do for the head teacher rather than a principle they believed in. Flutter and Rudduck (2006) argued that teachers need to change their identities and not just their behaviour.

When asked about their perception of pupil participation at a more general level, staff referred to everyday decisions both within and outside of class. For example, working in pairs, in groups, asking questions, sharing ideas and expressing opinions on their classroom, playground and meal times. If pupil

participation is perceived in these general, wide ranging terms then valuing children's views must surely be at the heart of a school's ethos and culture if it is to work successfully for all children. I argue that it follows that when it comes to decision making around more sensitive issues such as quality of teaching, that same ethos needs to remain in order for children to be truly involved in decisions which affect them. It has been argued that participation is not static and involves relationships over time and space (Tisdall., 2013). If staff actively facilitate pupil involvement in their daily interactions and value these experiences then participating in more structured contexts such as being asked their views by the school council around a particular issue will perhaps seem more purposeful as they have experienced being listened and responded to on a daily basis. In the longer term, as previous research has suggested this will have a positive impact on children's self-esteem, sense of agency and facilitate them to believe they are able to influence their own lives.

#### Influence of head teacher and teachers

The influence of the Head teacher and individual teachers was emphasised by some members of staff in two schools.

It's naturally come down because the Head teacher is very open and allows them to have lots of ideas (C-SLT).

I think it really does depend on though what kind of Head teacher you have at the top and teachers as well, whether they like children to be able to have a say. Some HTs and teachers, it's my way or the highway and others you know value their opinions (C-TA & ELSA).

You've got certain classes that aren't as inclusive as others and that's partly the teachers just put the barrier up and doesn't want to involve the children because it's out of their comfort zone (C-DH).

The HT is always keen to get the school council involved in things (A-CT).

This provides support for the importance of embedding a shared understanding of pupil participation within the school culture. As one of the comments

suggests, if left to individual discretion, some teachers may not for whatever reason commit to the shared philosophy.

### Interpretation of 'pupil voice'

There was variation amongst staff in relation to their interpretation of the term 'pupil voice'. When asked, most had heard of it and believed it to be about children being able to express their opinions and be listened to by adults in school. None of the participants told me where it originated or what it was intended to encapsulate. This is not to assume that they did not know, only that they did not report this when interviewed. Lundy (2007) argued that the term is unhelpful as it fails to encapsulate the principles of Article 12 of the UNCRC which it was designed to serve as a short hand reference to. It could also be a sign that the term pupil voice is not explicitly used within the settings in which they work. While most staff had heard of the term, those who had not were teaching assistants. This could be further evidence to support the need for a whole school shared understanding and approach which reaches all staff.

This research supports the assertion by Lundy (2007) and Tisdall (2013) that the term itself is unhelpful. Tisdall (2013) argued that one of the drawbacks of the term is that emphasising 'voice' can exclude those children who do not communicate verbally or perhaps require more time or support to communicate. The lack of clarity around the term could also serve to challenge teachers identities (Bragg, 2007).

There was a variety of responses about the conceptualisation of the term 'pupil voice'. Some of these included being heard, listened to as well references to rights. No one, however made an explicit link to pupil voice and UNCRC Article 12 or more generally to children's rights. When asked if they had heard of the UNCRC, again there was a range of responses:

We are a rights respecting school which is based on the Unicef...um... articles (A-TA & 1:1 TA).

Yes, we're doing the school meal thing where everyone has the right to a decent meal (A-CT).

I've heard of it but I don't know what's in it (C-DH).

I am aware of it, but I can't quote anything. Is it rights regardless?... No rights respecting! (B-TA).

#### **4.3.3 How do members of staff view school councils?**

##### Role of adults

I see them as my team of helpers (B- SC & SENDCo).

This view was expressed by the member of staff who worked with the school council in school. She also reported being the one who took minutes for the council at meetings. Comments from other members of staff across all three settings included references to needing a certain degree of adult involvement but this varied among individuals. This could be an indication of their understanding of how the school council works but also of their own beliefs about the extent to which children are or should be empowered to lead and organise themselves in school.

##### An introduction to democracy

Staff in all settings appeared to value the idea that school councils were the school equivalent of adult models of councils and that learning the processes and procedures associated with that, such as taking minutes and holding roles and responsibilities. For some staff, developing children's understanding of citizenship and the structures and processes involved were prevalent:

Making mini adults, like a mini world in our own school (A – TA & 1:1 TA).

It's a nice way of introducing things like democracy and how our country is run (B-CT).

In addition to teaching the children involved about democracy and providing experience of leadership and responsibility, some staff also felt that school council connected children with adults:

I think the school council are representatives of their peers. And they bring the voice of the people to the management, be it to the teacher who is running it, be it the head teacher, they bring they are the kind of the bridge between bodies (A-HT).

This view of school councils does mean that only those few who are selected to be councillors are benefiting from this. It could be argued that being on the school council is a privilege and therefore may affect the children ultimately chosen but also the perception of other children not selected. Although all three schools highlighted the democratic procedures used to choose school councillors in each class, staff also highlighted that sometimes they also played a role in deciding.

I think there are two important points here. Firstly, the school council is a small group and so these benefits, as prioritised by staff, are unlikely to affect that many children. Secondly, those children who find it difficult to read or write or to speak publicly but who may have very good ideas and relationships with others, may be deterred from engaging with school council if they are not supported in communicating or taking part in decision making. This was the case in one of the schools in the current research. During a final paired interview, one of the school councillors shared that prior to joining school council, he felt unable to share his views in class and did not usually put up his hand when the teacher asked questions. He felt that attending school council developed his confidence and self-belief. This highlights the need for schools to have a shared and consistent philosophy underpinning their decision for having a school council and ensuring that this influences how the council is run. If, as I would argue it is from a Children's Rights perspective, then all four aspects of Lundy's (2007) model would be in place within an environment which was committed to a shared ethos around the value of a child's right to participate in decisions affecting them.

#### Positive experience for popular children

Mager and Nowak (2013) argue that the problem with participation is that it is sometimes restricted to representatives and can lead to the existence of elites amongst peers. This suggests that rather than acting as a body empowering all

children, it is actually creating division between children. If it is the case that the 'more charismatic' and 'confident' children apply to be on the council this would serve only to put those who could benefit most from believing that their views deserve to be listened to and acted upon where appropriate. Findings suggest that pupils may be selected because of their popularity amongst peers; however, it did not seem to be the case from this phase that the existence of a school council was creating division amongst children:

It tends to be the more charismatic children that tend to get voted on (B-SC & SENDCo).

Its normally the really confident children who end up being on the school council. Mainly just because of the politics of the classroom (C-SLT).

They (other pupils) always seem quite keen to put ideas forward (A-CT).

Oh yes it's very popular (C-DH).

### Communication with peers and younger children

The findings suggest a varied picture across the three schools in terms of the extent and success of communication between school councils and other pupils in school.

If you were to ask someone in class what SC (school council) are working on at the moment I don't know if they would particularly be able to say (A-CT).

There also seemed to be concern among staff about the involvement of and communication with younger children in school. It could be argued that the formal format of school council meetings in these schools is not providing children, particularly in Year R and Year 1 the opportunity to engage as fully as they might.

Not sure the 4 year olds would really, they could be there in body, but whether they would be there in understanding? (A-HT).

I am not sure that younger children are 100% aware (B-SC & SENDCo).

## Chapter Five    Phase Two

### 5.1 Methods

#### 5.1.1 Sample

Two of the schools which took part in Phase One, School A and School B, also took part in Phase Two. This allowed me to analyse the findings and compare comments from staff and pupils at the same schools.

#### 5.1.2 Participants

The children involved were from key stage 2 (Year 3-6) in two primary schools- School A and School B (see Table 1 in Chapter Three for school information).. Although all three school councils had representatives from key stage 1 and there is a gap in the literature around eliciting the views of younger children in school councils, I decided to only interview and work with pupils from key stage 2 (Year 3-6) for several reasons:

- **Organisation and space** – It would have proven too disruptive to get all members of the school council together every week for several weeks. As a result of changes beyond my control such as changes to the timetable, staff absence and school trips, I had to be flexible in terms of when and where I met with the councils each week.
- **Interviews**- this may have required alternative interview formats and activities to match the pupils' developmental levels.
- **Ethical consideration and time** -Research by Harcourt and Hagglund (2013) explored the views of young children aged between 4 and 5 about their understanding of rights. They ensured that children were gradually introduced to the nature of their involvement in the research by familiar school staff for several weeks prior to beginning. I felt that this was ethically responsible and was not something I felt was possible in the current research.

Both school councils had just been elected in September and early October and I interviewed and worked with them from the end of October to the beginning of

December 2016. All participants were new members of the school council.

Table 38 shows participant information and pseudonyms. Due to the scope and time constraints of the current research, I did not invite the third school to take part in Phase Two and made this clear at the beginning when negotiating their involvement. They were agreeable to this and permitted me to pilot a range of participatory techniques with their council members. This was a valuable experience for both myself in terms of developing the questions I would use in the paired interviews and selecting and adapting the most effective participatory techniques.

Table 38. Participant information and pseudonyms

<b>School A</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>School B</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>
Year 6 boy	A6B	Year 6 boy	B6B
Year 6 girl	A6G	Year 6 girl	B6G
Year 5 boy	A5B	Year 5 boy	B5B
Year 5 girl	A5G	Year 5 girl	B5G
Year 4 boy	A4B	Year 4 boy	B4B
Year 4 girl	A4G	Year 4 girl	B4G
Year 3 boy	A3B	Year 3 boy	B3B
Year 3 girl	A3G	Year 3 girl	B3G

### **5.1.3 Methods of data collection**

#### *5.1.3.1 Initial paired interviews*

I interviewed children in pairs to elicit their views of their role as school councillors and their perceptions of pupil involvement in decision making in their school. I interviewed each pair of children in a quiet room in their own school for confidentiality and so that I could record them for transcription. Each interview lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. I began each interview by introducing myself and going through the consent detail and aims of the research.



By interviewing the school council members in pairs, I planned to help reduce the power imbalance between myself and them. It was also in an effort to reduce responder bias. This can occur when the presence of the researcher can influence the behaviour of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As I highlighted earlier in this chapter, I do not believe it is possible for the researcher to separate themselves from the participants in an interview as it is a shared experience specific to that context and time; however, given the age of the participants and it being a school context in which answers are often sought from pupils, I wanted to try to minimise this imbalance. I also explored their understanding of knowledge and truth by including a question around this in the sorting activity. I comment further on this in Chapter Six.

### *5.1.3.2 Development of interviews*

#### Piloting of interview activities

My thinking around how best to elicit the school council members' views has also been influenced by personal construct psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955). As I was interested in understanding how the pupils made sense of the issues we discussed prior to working with them as a group, Table 39 summarises the activities trialled during the pilot.

Table 39. Techniques and activities piloted with school council members

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>Used in interview?</b>
A drawing and its opposite	A PCP technique that can be used to explore with the child their view of the world (Beaver, 2011).	Most pupils took too long to draw	No

Rating scale activity	Technique used in solution focused approaches. Rate where they think they are now, where they would like to be (in relation to role on school council in this context).	Older children understood the concept. Possibility of some children thinking it's right or wrong answer	Yes, in some of the final interviews with children who understood the concept to rate their confidence in role.
Diamond ranking activity	Based on PRA. I gave pairs of children statements about school councils which they had to rank in order of importance.	Very effective as they generated discussion between pairs and prompted them to justify their views to each other.	Yes
Cartoon drawings of familiar situations	Pre-drawn drawings for children to comment on. Designed to be open ended and child-led.	Mixed response across ages of pilot group.	Yes

I made the following changes after conducting the pilot:

1. I adapted the diamond ranking activity for younger children so that they could place them in an order which made sense to them, either in a straight line vertically or horizontally. It was the discussion around the activity which was important rather than the placing of the statement and pictures.

2. I developed a further activity based on the diamond ranking activity and an activity called Opinion Finders (Welsh Assembly Government, 2015) in which children are given trigger statements about a topic and have to gain the views of their peers about this statement. I developed the actual trigger statements from my discussions with the school council members during the pilot. In my adapted version for the paired interview, either I or the children chose a statement and read it out and had to decide in pairs whether they agreed or not. I piloted this and found it worked well with younger children who seemed to prefer faster paced activities. While sometimes the pupils simply said whether they agreed or not, often after having made their decision they would talk more about their reasons which led to discussion between the pair.

3. I had noted that my initial questions were perhaps too focused on school council and not enough on decision making so I adapted the statements to include a greater balance between the two.

#### Development of Interview questions

As I was using visual activities to help facilitate discussion, I did not follow an interview schedule but rather had some key questions and areas I wanted to cover. These arose from the aims of the research, the research questions related to this phase of the study and the piloting of participatory techniques conducted with school council members from School C. The key questions used and the research questions they are linked to are highlighted in Table 40.

Table 40. Table showing interview questions and how they are linked to research questions

<b>Interview question</b>	<b>Research question related to</b>
Tell me about school council?	RQ 3 & 4 This open question allowed pupils to share their views about school council without constraint.
How come there is a school council?	RQ 3 & 4 This question was chosen to elicit pupils' views regarding the purpose of school council.
How does it work?	RQ 3 & 4 I chose this question to gain a greater insight into how they perceived the organisation of their school council and the extent to which school councillors play a role in its organisation and decisions around its purpose.
How come you wanted to join school council?	RQ 3 & 4 I wanted to explore pupils' individual reasons and expectations around school councils.
Tell me about decisions you make in school?	RQ 3 & 4 This question was used to explore the extent to which pupils perceived themselves as being in making decisions as well as the nature of decisions being made.

#### *5.1.3.4 Development of group session activities*

Each school council took part in weekly sessions in which we explored a range of participatory techniques to help develop each council's chosen focus as well as their understanding of inclusion and skills at eliciting the views of other pupils in school. These activities are described and the rationale for choosing each

one is shown in Table 41. These activities were used to contribute to research questions 3 and 4. Each session had a focus which I shared with the council members. The activities were taken and/or adapted from the materials published from the Welsh Assembly Government (2015) and from *Participation: Spice it up!* (Save the Children Fund, 2002). A participatory technique from the latter resource has been used with pupils in previous research in which pupils engaged in a mind mapping activity evaluating participation in their school (Cross et al. 2014). Given the similarity in theme to the current research, I therefore decided to adapt a selection of these for work with each group.

Table 41. Summary of participatory activities used in weekly group sessions and rationale for their use.

Activity	Description	Rationale for selection
Zombies	Children stand in a circle and one child is in the middle and walks towards another child like a zombie (eg. arms stretched out). The child being walked towards shouts another child's name in the circle before the child in the middle reaches him or her. The 'zombie' then turns and walks towards that named child. This is an icebreaker activity.	The school councils had recently been elected and this activity would support children to get to know each other's names.
School council bingo	Ice breaker/team building game. Each pupil is given a bingo sheet and asked to move around the group asking each other questions so that they have a different name in each box.	This activity also allows them to find out a little more about each other.
Chains	Ice breaker and team building activity. Pupils are asked to arrange themselves in a particular order eg. alphabetical order of name. Can extend by asking them not to speak.	This activity allowed the group to think about communication and explore different ways of conveying a message to people with differing skills and abilities.
Dot voting	Consultation/information gathering activity. A question is posed on a large sheet of paper	This activity does not require children to contribute verbally or

	and children are given coloured dots to place beside their choice from a list of given options.	write anything down. It does require the question and options to be read aloud to everyone so that they can make their decision. Pictures can also be used to aid understanding. This could be a possible tool for school councillors to use when they want to gain the views of other pupils.
Value continuum	Children are given a statement and have to stand in a line. Where they stand in the line depends upon the extent to which they agree or disagree with that statement.	This activity could be used by school councillors with their classmates as a quick way of gaining their views on different topics.
Token debate	An activity to develop turn taking in discussions. It also encourages children to listen and think carefully before contributing as each time they contribute, they use a token.	I chose this activity to support the school councillors with running council meetings. It promotes participation and ensures each pupil has the opportunity to contribute if they wish.

### Use of journals

I provided each school councillor with their own journal to record their thoughts after each group session. The pupils were able to record their thoughts in different ways rather than just by writing to ensure their involvement in this part of the process would not be dependent on their literacy skills. Because of time restrictions, I was unable to use the reflective journals as I had intended so I let the school councillors take them home once the project had finished.

## **5.1.4 Procedures**

### *5.1.4.1 Initial interview procedure*

After building rapport with the school council members by talking about things going on in their school and topics they brought up, I began recording the interviews. I used the participatory activities at different points during the interviews as there was a unique dynamic between each pair of children and between myself and each child (see appendices 11a, b and c for the activities used during interviews). I wanted to provide pupils with the scope to generate their own views through actively engaging with the interview via use of the activities rather than passively doing what they have been asked in a linear way (Cotmore, 2004). Appendix 12 shows a sample of some of the completed participatory activities from both initial and final paired interviews).

### *5.1.4.2 Group sessions procedure*

The group sessions with each school council took place in different rooms in their own setting each week due to timetabling demands. The time that I was able to work with each group also varied again due to changes in timetable, school trips, lunch time rotas, etc. This required flexibility in terms of what could be done practically given the size and layout of space. An overview of sessions with each school is shown in Table 40 and 41. Depending upon the activity and the space and time available, the sessions involved a combination of sitting around a table to begin with and then either working together as one group or splitting into two groups for an activity before regrouping at the end.

In the first session, I checked with the group if what I had interpreted from the interviews about their preferred chosen focus for the group work was right or if they wanted to change it. School A identified gaining other children's views as a priority for them and School B wanted to do some work around improving their council's noticeboard. I therefore included activities which aimed at developing their skills in these areas (see appendix 13 for examples of completed activities from group sessions).

I also made reflective notes after each session which I will comment upon in the findings and discussion sections of this chapter.

#### 5.1.4.3 Adaptations for each group

Having interviewed the school council members in each setting, I noticed differences in the group dynamic of each council and in their response to me as a researcher. I therefore decided to adapt the subsequent sessions to account for this. In School B for example, I included more ice-breaker activities each week to help them get to know each other better. Not recognising each other and wanting to know everyone's names was a topic some of them identified in later sessions. I also found that I needed to vary the pace of the sessions between the two groups. Partly as a result of this, and the limited time, the journals were not used as much as I had anticipated so the children took these home to use as they wished at the end of the project.

Table 42. Overview of group sessions with School A

Session theme	Aim and activities
<p>1. <i>Including everyone in school council meetings</i></p> <p>(30 mins)</p> <p>Everyone attended</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go through consent form again with everyone (previously explored and signed in initial paired interviews).</li> <li>• Give out the reflective journals and explain what they are and that they can remain anonymous.</li> <li>• Share the aims of the sessions and what they had expressed as being important to them during paired interviews.</li> <li>• Ice-breaker: Human Bingo</li> <li>• Main activity: Tokens debate</li> <li>• Personalise journal</li> <li>• End game: Zombies</li> </ul>
<p>2. <i>Techniques for gaining pupils' views</i></p> <p>(40 mins)</p> <p>Everyone attended</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review consent form and check everyone wants to stay</li> <li>• Activities: Dot voting Line continuum Life line</li> <li>• Journal entry</li> </ul>



<p>3. <i>Communicating with other pupils</i></p> <p><b>School council's choice: notice board</b></p> <p>(30 mins)</p> <p>Everyone attended</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review consent form and check everyone wants to stay</li> <li>• Starter: Chains</li> <li>• Activities: Evaluated current board in corridor- empty.</li> <li>• Drawing: Split into two groups and explored different ways of making the notice board more accessible to everyone.</li> <li>• Journal reflection</li> </ul>
<p>4. <i>Communicating with other pupils- continued.</i></p> <p><b>School council's choice: notice board</b></p> <p>(35 mins)</p> <p>Yr 3 children absent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review consent form and check everyone wants to stay</li> <li>• Review previous week's focus</li> <li>• Activity: complete notice board designs</li> <li>• Evaluate notice board ideas. Used Opinion finder activity sheet as example of working out pros and cons for display on board.</li> <li>• Shared next steps as a school council</li> </ul>

Table 43. Overview of group sessions with School B

Session theme	Aim and activities
<p>1. <i>Including everyone in school council meetings</i></p> <p>(30 mins)</p> <p>Everyone attended</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go through consent form (previously explored and signed in initial paired interviews).</li> <li>• Give out reflective journals and explain what they are and that they can remain anonymous.</li> <li>• Share the aims of the sessions and what they had expressed as being important to them during paired interviews.</li> <li>• Ice-breaker: Human Bingo</li> <li>• Main activity: Tokens debate</li> <li>• Personalise journal</li> <li>• End game: Zombies</li> </ul>
<p>2. <i>Techniques for gaining pupils' views</i></p> <p><b>School council's choice</b></p> <p>(30 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review consent form and check everyone wants to stay</li> <li>• Starter: Sharing successes</li> <li>• Activities: Dot voting Line continuum Life lines</li> <li>• Journal entry</li> <li>• End game: Zombies</li> </ul>

Everyone attended	
3. <i>Communicating with other pupils</i>  (30 mins)  Everyone attended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review consent form and check everyone wants to stay</li> <li>• Activities: Evaluated current board in corridor- empty.</li> <li>• Drawing: Split into two groups and explored different ways of making the notice board more accessible to everyone.</li> <li>• Journal reflection</li> </ul>
4. <i>Communicating with other pupils- continued.</i>  (30 mins)  Everyone attended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review consent form and check everyone wants to stay</li> <li>• Starter: Self-esteem stars</li> <li>• Review previous week's focus</li> <li>• Activity: complete notice board designs</li> <li>• Evaluate notice board ideas.</li> <li>• Shared next steps as a school council</li> <li>• Reflect in journal</li> </ul>

#### 5.1.4.4 Final interviews procedure

Following group sessions, I interviewed the same pairs of children again using the same range of participatory activities. The purpose of this was to see if there were any striking differences between their views after the sessions compared to before. I also asked them to rate from 0-10 how useful they found the activities and from 0-10 how confident they felt in their role now compared to when they started in school council. The purpose was not to try to ascribe this to the group sessions but to generate discussions about the topic in general. These interviews were then recorded and transcribed as with the initial interviews. One pupil chose not to have her final interview recorded so I made notes on her verbal responses during the interview and photographed their activities as I did with the other participants.

### 5.1.5 Data analysis

I took a grounded, inductive approach when analysing the interview data and was guided by the six phases of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). I chose this generic approach because it provided flexibility when analysing the qualitative data. I felt that this flexibility was needed more so in this phase than in Phase One because of the different sources of data I wanted to analyse – the participatory activities as well as the transcribed interviews. I think a great deal of information was gained through the communication between each pair of school councillors and I did not think that the form of data analysis used for the individual semi-structured interviews enabled me to analyse from multiple sources in the same depth as this approach did. I imported the interview transcripts into Nvivo (a qualitative data analysis software program) and sorted data under initial codes so that it could be easily reviewed both under its allocated code and in its original location. This was important because I could then check extracts in their original context to judge what I perceived to be the intended meaning and code them accordingly.

I followed an iterative process which involved reading the transcripts several times and making notes of interesting features of the data which appeared to be emerging. I then labelled the data under headings which I derived from the interesting features I noted and re-read again to check if they were about the same thing or something else. I also asked another colleague to read through them to see if they thought they were reasonable given the data they were presented with. This was useful because I could combine some of the initial codes having decided that they were about the same thing. For example, I combined the codes 'Child to child communication' and 'Link between pupil and adult' to form the new code 'Communication' (see appendix 14 for the full list of initial codes applied to the data and appendix 15 for an example of a matrix of labelled data extracts under revised themes). The extract below shows a section of data coded under this revised code:

They know they can talk to the teachers but it's harder because they're always in their position and as a child you if that person needs help you're a child as well and you might have been in that position or know how it feels. Well they were a child but now they're an adult they might

have forgotten about it. They wouldn't sort of like know it ... That's also why it's in classes so not just only year 6 do it cause that's not really going to help the year 3s ... because they're older so they don't really know that much about it, like that position (A4G)

Yes, maybe that one there... cause sometimes it's easier to tell the truth to a person who's similar to your age. (A5G)

Sometimes some children, like some of the shy people get a bit nervous if they're new, they get a bit nervous about adding their ideas to the piece of paper and they're quite shy so but if it's children that they've made friends with and they know then they'll get to like trust them more... Say a teacher was asking them, they might think that they're saying a wrong answer, like think they're not going to write it down or something but cause its we they're probably gonna think they're always gonna write it down. So they might feel a bit more happier for younger people to do it. (B6G)

The next step involved checking the photos of the activities from each interview together with my notes around those to remind myself of the context from which each extract was taken. This allowed me to make sure I did not miss out or misinterpret any possible meanings in the data. I then began to think more widely in terms of possible themes around each focus area: school councils and pupils' involvement in decision making. This involved sorting the codes into possible themes and then grouping the data linked to those codes under the overarching theme.

## 5.2 Findings

In this section I present the findings from my analysis in the form of themes and sub-themes. Figure 22 shows the thematic map relating to research question 3 and Figure 23 shows the thematic map relating to research question 4.

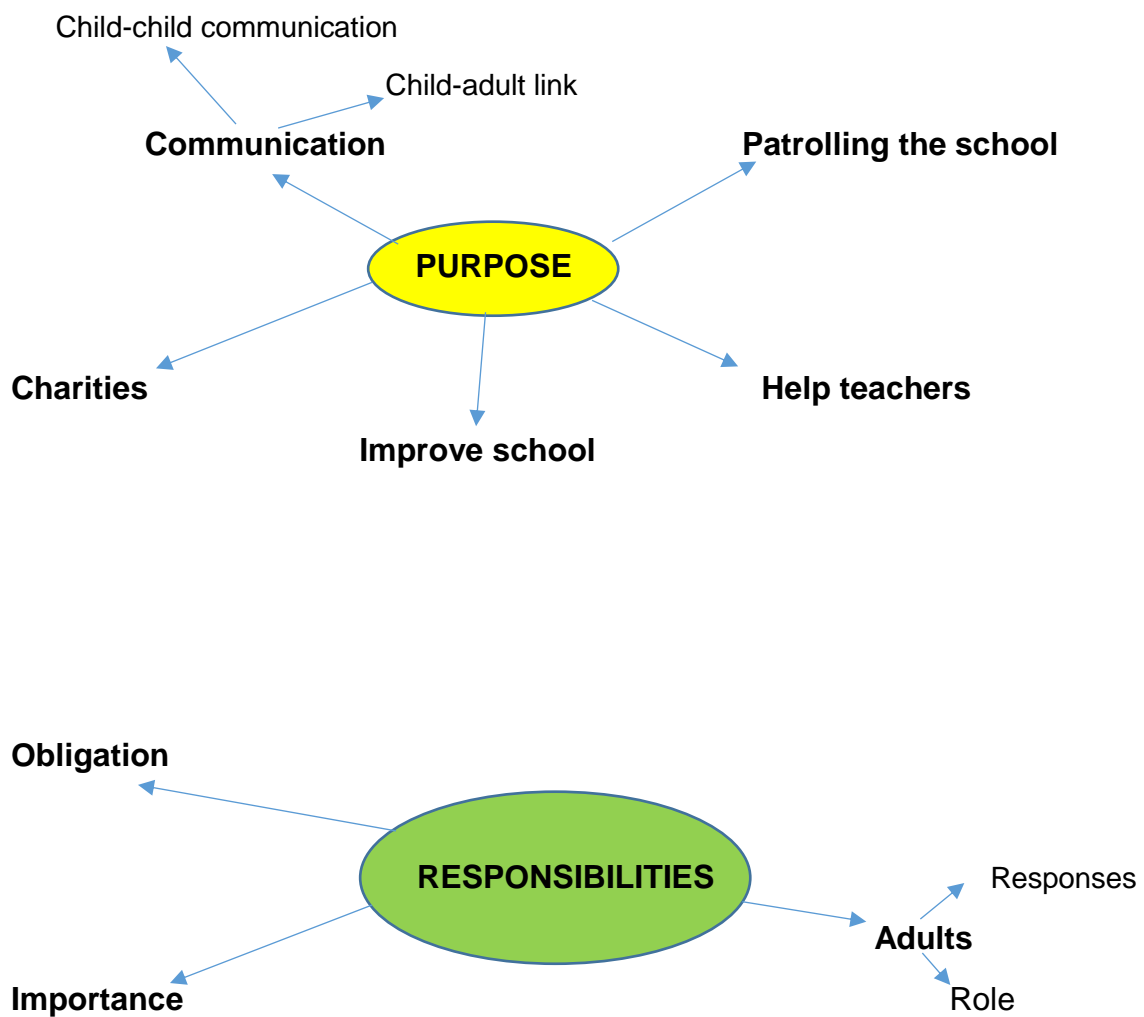


Figure 22. Thematic map showing themes and sub-themes relating to school councils.

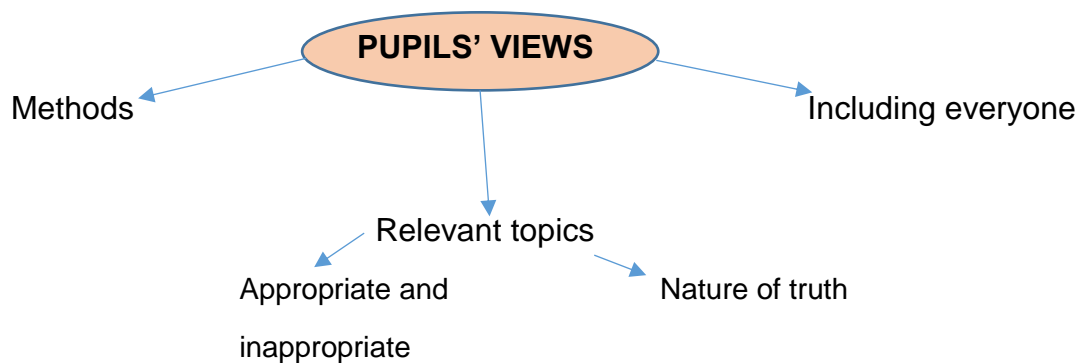


Figure 23. Thematic map showing the theme Pupils' views and its sub-themes relating to participation in decision making

### 5.2.1 Theme 1: Purpose

#### Help teachers

One of the school councillors in School B felt that an important role of school council was to support adults, especially teachers. This view was not shared with the other councillor in the paired interview. It was not initially brought up by her but was one of the phases in the diamond ranking activity. It provoked greater in depth discussion between the pair:

Making life easier for adults.... that should go near the top (B5G)

I'd put it there because usually its quite hard to be a teacher and make all the decisions so it would be easier to have one more helping hand (B5G)

I think it should be down there because it's not that important for the school council (B5B)

#### Patrolling the school

Children in both school schools, but not all of them, highlighted solving social problems in the playground as being an important part of their job. They

believed it to be their role to make sure everyone was behaving appropriately too.

Make sure everyone behaves ok because a lot of the time in playgrounds they play basketball and bull dog and they don't think about the children around them. They end up getting pushed over and that's the problem ... you have to watch out for that (B6G).

We also have to stop rumours (B6B).

We sort out their problems which is a very, very big help of school councils (B4G).

### Improving school

All school councillors referred to quite broad statements such as 'improving the school' or 'making the school a better place' when commenting on its aims. Some children in both schools felt that improving the physical environment within school was important. Some of them went into more detail, giving examples of what or how improve and some were vaguer. The comments below illustrate these points:

If we didn't have school council, we couldn't improve the school (B5G)

It's changing the school to make it better (B4B))

We look after the school, we improve the school, we add things (A3G)

We have to make up really good ideas to change the school and well the first idea we came up with was to say what you think will make the school a better place to learn (A6B)

We got an idea for that bench over there and it was just put in over the summer holidays (B6B)

### Impact out of school

Most children felt that raising money for charities was an important part of the school council's job. This was one of the items on the diamond ranking task and was one of the most debated topics during the interviews in both schools. Pupils usually felt that it was important but perhaps not necessarily the exclusive role of the school council as other classes and groups could raise money as well. Two pairs of children, one from each school, identified it as being the most important role for a school council. One pair changed their mind during their final interview and put it in the second row while moving 'Finding out children's views about school issues', in the top position. The other pair of children in Year 4 in the other school kept it at the top in both interviews when doing the activity but their discussions involved much more reference to sharing pupil's views than during the first interview. One discussion highlighted one pupil's views and enabled him to explain his thoughts around it:

Yeh, cause like if we built a school playground for ourselves and made it much better and we only had to donate a little amount of money to charity and it would make a really big difference but what do is we have a really big amount of money and put it into the playground and it only makes a small difference to the school so that's why raising money for charities is at the top (AB6).

### Communication

#### Pupil to pupil

Several children commented on the importance of children being better placed than adults to elicit other children's views. This was raised by different pairs in the interview and during the groups sessions when taking part in some of the activities. One pupil raised the issue prior to taking part in any of the activities in interview:

As a child if that person needs help, you're a child as well and you might have been in that position or know how it feels. Well they were a child but now they're an adult they might have forgotten about it. They wouldn't sort of like know it (A4G)



They might feel a bit happier for younger people to do it (record their views) (A5G)

Sometimes it's easier to tell the truth to a person who's similar to your age (A5B)

Pupils from both schools commented on their school council notice board, suggesting that there was one but they did not use it:

Is there a school council board? (A4B).

Mmm, yeh in the hallway there's one but we haven't had ours yet have we? (B3G).

Adults might put things in the wrong way so you need other children (A4B).

#### Pupil to staff

Some children commented on the importance of sharing children's views with adults but this was not raised by many. One pupil commented on how she regarded herself as a go-between in communicating problems to adults, such other children's behaviour:

When people are having problems they are supposed to report it to us and we can tell the head teacher (B5G)

The school needs to know how the children feel (B6G)

### **5.2.2 Theme 2: Responsibilities**

#### Obligation to peers

Some children expressed how important it was to live up to their peers' expectations and set a good example to others. They highlighted trust as being important in a position of responsibility such as school councillor:

If you're voting, it's not just your friend it's someone you trust to be like a school councillor (A6B).

..your class voted for you and so you can't just go into class and muck about and stuff.(A4B).

People will think 'Oh you're a school councillor, I can trust you'. That's why they voted for us, 'cause they trust us (A4G).

### Importance

One pupil in Year 3 commented on where the council meetings took place, associating this with how important school council were. This was not mentioned by other councillors but the other year 3 pupil being interviewed with him did not disagree with him. She nodded her head when he highlighted it and they gave the room we were in as an example. Another pupil commented on her own expectations about school council prior to joining:

The places we have our meetings are quite quiet and that means we're responsible people (A3G).

I thought we were going to meet every week in the staffroom with Mrs X (Head teacher) but it's not like that at all (A5G).

There's no point in making someone a school councillor and not being a very important person. If you're a school councillor you work very hard and being important is our reward (B6G).

Two pupils from Year 6 in School A had different views on how they felt the younger members of school council felt about their role:

Everyone's quite organised 'cause they're actually quite dedicated, like the smaller ones feel really important to have a role (A6B).

Because they're quite young, they're not really interested in school business....they feel like it's a bit boring and they don't really understand it (A6G).

## Adults

### Responses

Several children in both schools expressed their belief that adults should respond to children when they have been asked for their views about a decision, even if the final decision was not the one they wanted:

I think that's fair but they could just say to the children...School pet won, they probably don't think it's going to improve so they said ok we're going to go for the top three now so we can get lots of projects and improve the school. Say if the toilets won they probably wouldn't have done top three.

I think it's a bit double crossed because they asked us for our opinion. It's a perfectly good decision but they could have at least told us first, that's what I'm a bit like... (A6B).

Some adults think school council is good and some disagree with it. It's kind of awkward because they think the adults should make the decisions because children don't really know what they're doing (A3B).

They (adults) should at least have an effort and try... they should go to the children and they should explain why they're not allowed to have it, like we can't have that, it's a bit too big or a bit too expensive. (B6B).

All the children commented that both adults and children should have a say in decisions.

Adults and children should make decisions (A3B).

If the adults do it what's the point of having a school council, they're just having their own ideas, what's the point of having us (A5B).

### Role

Some pupils in School A expressed frustration at the role adults played during meetings. They felt that if they were going to set up roles for the councillors then they should allow these to operate. Some did however feel that while they wanted to take more ownership over the meetings and had experience of doing so, that adults were still needed at meetings:

There should always be an adult at school council meetings...yeh (A5B).

Because otherwise it would literally go crazy (A5G).

When commenting on how their experience of school council was not as they imagined, two Year 5 children said:

The difference is they never do like chairmans, Mrs XX (adult linked to SC) takes charge really. She's basically thinking it's her meeting (A5B)

The whole point... (A5G).

Yeh the whole point of the chair is to say calm down or whatever. But she only does that when Mrs XX can't make it. I'd like that to change I think (A5B).

### **5.2.3 Theme 3: Pupils' views**

#### Including everyone

When asked about including everyone, there was a range of responses and most of these were involved using their own experiences of school to illustrate their understanding of the term:

To include them in games (B4B)

To make everyone feel welcome (A3G)

If people weren't included then it will be unfair because they didn't get to share their ideas... and the inspectors wouldn't be very happy yeh. (A5G)

Two pupils, one from each school, highlighted how some children may not want to have a say and they felt this was ok too.

### Relevant topics

#### Appropriate and inappropriate

All children acknowledged that sometimes children make suggestions which are not realistic or that would not be regarded in the same way by adults.

Yeh but some people do silly things, like we should have a heated swimming pool (A6B).

Most children referred to issues such as playground, toilets, school pets and one child mentioned learning and lessons.

#### Nature of truth

When asked whether it was possible to know the truth, most children said that it was and gave examples to illustrate their points, such as arguing in the playground and someone seeing you or stealing a pencil. One pupil in year 6 gave a different response:

There are lots of different truths and it's impossible to know 'the truth' (A6B).

### Methods

All school councillors said that they have a book in which they record theirs and other children's ideas. They reported that they stand in front of the class and ask the class for their views which they then write in their book. Sometimes, in the younger classes, the teacher records their ideas in their book. They then bring their book back to council meetings and feedback. Some commented that they sometimes did not remember to do it and when asked about other ways of gathering views, most did not mention any. When asked if they had a suggestions box, most said there is or might have been one but were uncertain:

They put their hands up and we choose people (B4G).

Sometimes if they want to, they come and speak to us and we write their ideas down. There's not many other ways of getting ideas down...except for in your own head but that's not really... (B6B).

We might just go up to children...(A3B).

That is actually quite a good idea to have a suggestion box because say if like we were saying if they forgot they can just put it in the suggestion box. (A6G).

I think so, I think Mrs X checks it (suggestion box) about every month (B4B).

#### **5.2.4 Findings from group sessions.**

During the final interview, I asked children to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 how useful they found the activities used during the group sessions. All of the participants rated them as being from 6 to 10. They also rated themselves on how confident they felt to do their role when they had just joined school council in September and now that they had been in role for a few months. They all reported feeling more confident. Their reasons included 'getting more used to meetings', 'I know everyone now and I was shy before' and 'I feel more able to stand in front of the class'.

They identified the lollypop sticks and dot voting activities as being the most useful activities for them as councillors. The lollypop sticks can be used as a tool to help conduct meetings, ensuring that everyone has a go at contributing and encourages children to listen and think before they speak. The dot voting activity is a participatory technique used to elicit people's views.

I found from my own reflections during these sessions that the children in each council differed in their group dynamic, as one might expect; however, I found that both groups did not know everyone's names in the group. One group appeared to enjoy ice-breaker activities more than the other so I included these in each session to support their development as a group.

### **5.2.5 Reflections on key differences between initial and final interviews**

I noticed that the dynamic between myself and the school councillors had changed; we seemed more at ease with each other possibly because we had worked together in group sessions and our relationship had developed. I found that all school councillors engaged more quickly and appeared to feel more comfortable when asked their views.

When completing the diamond ranking activity, one child commented on the use of the word 'some' in one of the statements. He did not pass comment on this before and it led to a discussion with his co-interviewee about the importance of it being all children.

Some children should have their say...it's only saying 'some' children and not 'all' so that go there (A6B).

In their final interview, a pupil in Yr 4 commented that:

you can't say no to someone who is disabled (A4G).

When I explored this further with her, she gave the example of not being able to say no to someone when playing a game.

## 5.3 Discussion

### 5.3.1 How do members of the school council perceive their role?

#### Communication

Communication between children and their peers and between adults and children was regarded as being an important part of having a school council. In some cases, I was surprised by the clarity with which the participants articulated this, especially the view that children are more able to understand other children's concerns and know which questions to ask. This is in line with findings from research by Cox and Robinson-Plant (2005) who reported that children who were not in school councils felt more able to approach a school council member for useful information than a teacher.

Although they felt communicating with their peers was an important aspect of their role, they found it challenging to identify how they might support other pupils to communicate their views to them. During group sessions, both school councils commented on their use of books to record pupils' ideas and suggestion boxes for pupils to write down their ideas and deposit in them. None of the school councillors suggested alternative ways of asking for or recording ideas without prompting from me. This could reflect the wider processes used in school, such as an emphasis on written communication particularly in Key stage 2. Their comments during the group sessions reflected the view that drawings and pictures were for younger children. These findings support the argument for developing more inclusive ways, such as using participatory activities based on PRA, of involving all children in decision making (Cox & Robinson-Plant, 2005).

This may link to their understanding of including others which in both schools was very much in terms of including other children in games or play during lunch time. They seemed familiar with the idea of including others in this social context but did not appear to connect it to being able to participate in decisions in school. They did, however, suggest that as school councillors they did have a responsibility to sort out playground problems. This together with emphasising the importance of keeping the school tidy to make it better reflects the findings of Cox and Robinson-Plant (2005) who found teachers reporting their confusion around children's apparent self-imposed parameters over what they felt allowed



to discuss or be involved in making decisions about. This may support the arguments that children are best placed to elicit the views of other children because they are more likely to be aware of prevalent issues and secondly, the need to develop the whole school ethos so that it involves working with children in terms of decision making across the school.

### Reasons for being elected

Trust was also evident across both schools and seen as a reason to vote for someone. This was in contrast to the findings from phase one which show adults highlighting popularity and having charisma as reasons for being voted for by peers. This is further justification for gaining the views of pupils as it provides their perspectives which may not be as expected. By misinterpreting what they perceive about their role, there is a risk of perpetuating a value which is perhaps not intentional or desired.

Children did not mention being chosen for academic reasons, as previous research has found (Hartas, 2011; Cox & Robinson-Plant, 2005). They did comment that the secretary was chosen because he or she was good at writing but they did not raise this as an important skill when this was discussed in interviews or in group sessions. The fact that they did not mention their literacy skills and or as highlighted earlier in this chapter, suggest alternatives to writing or telling someone as a way of communicating suggests that the wider ethos of the school emphasises the importance of writing and reading. Given the current tension in schools between standards and inclusion, teachers may find it difficult to justify activities if they do not feel they are explicitly linked to the core curriculum. It could be argued however that the importance placed on the UNCRC in special educational needs would benefit being adhered to throughout mainstream schools (Sharp, 2014).

### Power

The idea of importance was raised and it did seem that some children viewed being a school councillor as being a step up the ladder of authority. They viewed themselves as communication links between the rest of the pupils and

the teachers. This development of almost a hierarchy amongst pupils has been briefly highlighted in existing research (Cox & Robinson-Plant, 2005). They reported that there was a feeling that those children who were members of school council had authority over other children in monitoring behaviour and school rules. This is consistent with reports from some members of school council in both schools in the current research.

### Contradictions

In relation to the role of adults, they were perceived as being needed but also as sometimes taking over during meetings. This varied between settings with some children in both schools expressing concerns for a child-centred school council but with the need for an adult to be there to facilitate rather than lead the discussions or activities. In School A, some of the children were able to identify a time when their elected chairperson was able to conduct a meeting whilst acknowledging it was challenging. In School B however the children reported not having had a meeting which was not led and recorded by the teacher involved. This could be evidence to support the argument for requiring a clear understanding amongst staff as to the purpose of school council and their role in it (Whitty and Wisby, 2007a).

While some children felt that representing their peers was the purpose of school councils, others thought it was to help adults. The latter reason has not been reported in the existing literature however it could be argued that their view was influenced by the views of the staff. This point will be discussed further in relation to phase one in Chapter Six.

### **5.3.2 How do members of the school council view pupil participation in decision making in school?**

#### Response

Lundy (2007) recognised a need for children to have time, space, audience and influence when expressing their views in accordance with Article 12 of the

UNCRC. It could be argued that part of having an audience and subsequent influence would involve some form of response to their expressed views however this response has been highlighted as not happening as a matter of course and shown to be a major source of frustration for pupils. In the current research, the reactions of pupils in both schools when discussing the lack of response from adults was very striking. Their tone of voice and body language conveyed a frustration when they described about not being told or explained to even if their views were perhaps not reflected in the decision made by an adult. To an extent, this reflects the findings of Cox and Robinson-Plant (2005) who reported a primary school pupil's frustration about not having heard the outcome of a decision they were consulted about by the school council. The pupil's frustration in their study was directed at the school council but they could have been waiting for a response from adults.

### Perception of knowledge

When asked about their beliefs about knowledge, I was struck by their discussions around whether it is possible to know the truth. While their views differed, they all had opinions and were able to provide definite examples to support their view. This supports the argument by Kershner and Hargreaves (2012) that primary aged children do have opinions about the nature of knowledge albeit at different levels of complexity.

### Participatory activities

In the final interviews the children all said that they found the activities useful and chose different ones they would like to use in their future work as school councillors. These tended to be around the topic of communication and improving communication among themselves at meetings and between school council and the rest of the school. Although the order of their ranking activities did not change greatly between the initial and final interviews, some of the language did and they commented on the language used in some of the ranking statements more than they did initially.

## **Chapter Six Overall Discussion**

This research is original in using both semi-structured interviews with both primary staff and school council members, as well as group sessions with key stage 2 school council members using participatory techniques to develop their skills and understanding. In this chapter I draw together and summarise the findings from both phases of the current research in relation to the research aims and highlight how it addresses the gaps in the literature by contributing to knowledge and methodology.

### **6.1 Contribution to knowledge**

#### **6.1.1 Role and relevance of school councils**

The current research has made a significant contribution to the recent lack of literature around the perceived role of school councils according to staff and children on the school council. There has been debate around the relevance and effectiveness of school councils in terms of facilitating pupil participation in decision making, such as the argument that it is the children involved who benefit (Taylor and Johnson, 2007; Cotsmore, 2004) rather than the other pupils in school. Findings from both phases of the current research support this argument to an extent, in that both adults and pupils interviewed felt that the role of school councillor was a special one associated with prestige, importance and popularity.

It can be argued that evidence from both phases supports the view that school councils can serve to divide children by aligning those children involved with staff, creating an elite group of pupils (Mager & Nowak, 2012). From several of the pupils' perspectives in the current research, this involved patrolling the playground. In terms of a member of staff's perceptions, it meant regarding the school council as being their team of helper. All participants however did comment on improving school, even if there did appear to be variation in what this looked like. Many school councillors regarded their role as being to make the school a better place and when working together in group sessions, they

demonstrated enthusiasm when exploring possible ways of making things change.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the usefulness of school councils alone to encourage and develop pupil participation in decision making has been questioned (Cross et al., 2014; Harcourt & Hagglund, 2013; Percey-Smith, 2010;) The current research provides evidence to support this view that having a school council alone does not necessarily result in increased pupil participation. It goes further to support the argument that there is a need for schools to focus more on process rather than product. For example, both school councils in the current research did not have the knowledge or skills regarding participatory techniques to gain the views of their peers. Their contradictory views regarding their role suggest that it does seem to be those involved in school council who benefit most from its existence. This highlights opportunities for schools which I will explore further in Chapter Seven.

### **6.1.2 Value placed on adult response**

In terms of staff's and pupils' perceptions of pupil participation in decision making, pupils felt strongly about being responded to by adults when they had been asked to share their views. This is consistent with findings from existing research (Cox & Robinson-Plant, 2005), particularly around the possibility of school councils being seen as tokenistic if their views do not seem to be acted upon without explanation (Alderson, 2000). The importance of pupils being responded to was raised by some adults but mostly they prioritised the terms 'pupil voice' and 'being heard' and 'listened to'. These terms are subject to interpretation and this highlights the need for having a shared understanding of the underpinning philosophy behind pupil participation and the role of the school council. As pupil participation and pupil voice, which was alluded to and explicitly referred to in Phase One, have risen out of the UNCRC Article 12, then having this as a shared model would be helpful to provide consistency and a clear focus and expectations for staff and pupils.

### **6.1.3 Impact of shared ethos**

Phase one emphasised the variation in emphasis on different reasons for having a school council. However, these primarily appeared to be from a citizenship perspective with a focus on meetings and more formal structures. There was also a perceived impact of senior staff, particularly head teachers, in changing this.

Phase two findings highlighted how children can be influenced by adults' views. For example, in School B the adult working with the school council described them as being her helpers and two of the school council members felt that making life easier for adults was an important priority for school councils.

It has been argued that focusing on decision-making specifically places an emphasis on the creation of more formal structures, such as school councils (Percey-Smith, 2010) and that these on their own are not sufficient for all pupils to participate. Previous research has led researchers to suggest that wider participatory processes are more beneficial for children's participation than relying solely on school councils (Cross et al. 2014; Cox & Robinson-Plant, 2005; McNeish & Newman, 2004). The findings from the current research support this view.

The current research also supports previous findings by Harcourt and Hagglund (2013) who adopted a bottom-up approach to explore young children's understanding of their participation rights. They concluded that children embedded the term 'rights' in terms of relationships with others and argued that lived or experienced participation rights have strong and necessary links with belonging and togetherness. The link between relationships with teachers and engagement in school has been suggested based on the findings from research by Cremin et al. (2011). Findings from both phases of the current research supports this emphasis on relationships as being an important factor in participation in decision making as well as the need for motivating pupils to be involved (McNeish & Newman, 2002).

Lundy's (2007) model of child participation could therefore be adapted for use in school settings to include adult response and ethos as being necessary factors for effective participation to take place from a children's rights perspective.

Figure 24 shows how I have adapted this model to incorporate these two factors. This might be helpful for schools to use when developing wider policies around pupil voice and inclusion. It could be useful for teachers to embed the process in their classrooms on a day to day basis and could support school council in developing tools for gaining the views of other children.

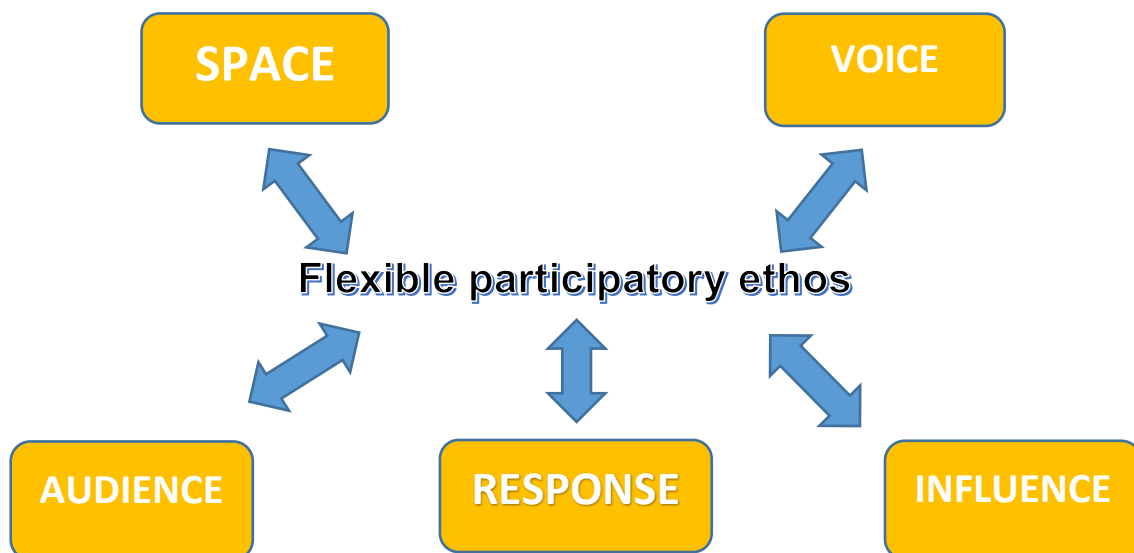


Figure 24. A model for inclusive pupil participation in decision making in schools.

## 6.2 Contributions to methodology

### 6.2.1 Use of participatory techniques to elicit children's views

The use of participatory techniques in interviews and group sessions in the current research builds on existing research which utilises such approaches to elicit children's and young people's views (Hill et al., 2017; Harcourt &

Hagglund, 2013; Cremin et al., 2011). Previous research into the views of teachers and pupils about their school council by Cox and Robinson-Plant (2005) used focus groups as a data collection method. The current research however contributed to methodology by using semi-structured interviews which incorporated participatory activities based on PRA.

#### *6.2.1.1 Interviews*

The diamond ranking technique helped facilitate in depth discussion between pairs of school councillors. Even though some of the Year 3 children approached it as more of a task to be completed, they still talked while sorting them which enabled me as the researcher to explore their comments in greater detail later during the interview or during group sessions. I have argued that this research supports the assertion that relationships with adults are important in facilitating participation. Given the time frame I had to complete the current research, I think using paired interviews together with participatory activities supported the pupils to feel more comfortable to share their views than if they had been interviewed alone or without activities to discuss. Previous research has involved children being prepared over several weeks prior to the beginning of research about what it would involve and who they would be working with (Harcourt & Hagglund, 2013). I found that the approach I adopted was a practical way of enabling children to express their views in the time available.

#### *6.2.1.2 Group sessions*

The participatory activities used developed children's awareness of other ways of gaining children's views. The school councillors did not have experience of these types of tools, possibly because they were new to the role of school councillor or because they were not widely used in school. However, they all felt they could use them in their role in the future when gathering children's views. The activities helped to facilitate discussions around inclusion and enabled me to see how the school councillors perceived what it meant to include people.



Child-to-child communication was an important issue for pupils and recognised by some staff. This linked to peer participatory research perspective on children being best placed to elicit other children's views and supports the argument for a need for appropriate training in participatory techniques for school councillors to develop participation skills (Whitty and Wisby, 2007a; Cox & Robinson-Plant, 2005).

This could be used to promote and embed an inclusive ethos from the bottom up. Leitch and Mitchell (2007) have argued that school cultures are dynamic and negotiated. It could be argued therefore that schools may be likely to benefit from actions initiated by adults and pupils. The findings from the current research support this view as the children interviewed did not mention their 'rights' at all during my work with them whereas adults mentioned it frequently. There could of course be many reasons for this but I found it striking that members of staff from one of the schools may feel it is actively promoting children's rights by having a Rights Respecters group. However, if children are not making the link or it is not made explicit to them then developing this understanding with the school and through the school council to other children may help develop this shared understanding.

## **Chapter Seven      Conclusion**

### **7.1 Limitations of current research and possible future research**

I recognise that I imposed my own personal view of working from a children's rights perspective when conducting this research and that this influenced the questions asked, activities used, and the conclusions drawn. There are other perspectives from which to view the aims of school councils as outlined in the literature review, such as from a citizenship perspective, and these may have placed a greater emphasis on other aspects of participation, such as the learning of formal processes involved in meetings. I also acknowledge that my interpretivist position recognises the role I played as the researcher in the interview process and so I would not expect my analysis to be replicated by another researcher.

Further research could involve a longitudinal study, possibly over the course of an academic year, following how the councillors are able to apply their skills and knowledge to elicit children views and develop the participatory processes in school council. As this research has highlighted the dilemma facing researchers around gaining access to specific groups of pupils at regular intervals, such future research would need to have a clear action orientated purpose for school so that they knew some form of positive change would happen as a result of their participation.

Phase One of the current research involved interviewing a small sample of adults from each setting as I wanted to gain a deeper insight into participants' views. Future research, however, could involve interviewing adults in other roles such as lunchtime supervisors, governors or parents which may provide further insight from different stakeholders' perspectives. Focus groups rather than interviews could be used to gain parents' views. This might provide a safer context for them to express their views given that they are not members of staff and may not feel as comfortable.

Despite efforts at developing rapport to put participants at ease, the use of semi-structured interviews in the current research may have led participants to feel like they were on the spot and they subsequently may have told me what

they thought I, as the researcher, wanted to hear. While I cannot be certain this was the case, I had reflected in my research journal that the participants did feel comfortable during the interview. My reflective notes were useful in recording behavioural observations from interviews which contributed to my overall analysis.

The current research could be extended in the future by gaining the views from the wider pupil population in each school. This would provide another valuable perspective from which to examine the effectiveness of school councils and wider systems used to facilitate pupil participation. Pupils' views could be gained using participatory activities or via a questionnaire which would involve adopting an alternative epistemological stance to the one taken in the current research. I believe that different ontological positions can contribute to our understanding of this topic and that the most appropriate approach should be taken depending on the nature of the question being asked.

As already discussed in Chapter Three, I did not work with the key stage 1 members of school councils. While the key stage 2 school council members commented on how they thought the key stage 1 children experienced school council, it would be a worthwhile venture for future research to utilise participatory techniques to enable these younger children to share their views about participating in school council and in school more widely. The research conducted by Harcourt and Hagglund (2013) around exploring children's rights from their own lived experiences provides further support for working with younger children to gain their perspectives.

I think there is scope for future research to develop and explore ways of facilitating younger children to be able to participate in decision making in school, regardless of ability. This is an area which highlights the need for a flexible participatory ethos and shared understanding of what participation is for and how it can be implemented in school. Future research could also explore the discourses from adults in schools around the involvement of Year R –Year 2 participation in decision making. Building on the current research and research by Harcourt and Hagglund (2013) could contribute to both knowledge and methodology in this field.

## **7.2 Implications for practice**

### **7.2.1 At a systemic level**

The findings from the current research provide possibilities for educational psychologists to support schools and other educational settings in their policy development around inclusion and pupil participation in decision making. This research has reinforced the need for clarity around the purpose of school councils as well as the need for creating opportunities for all children to express their view and be responded to. The setting up of a school council is not considered to be enough in itself to ensure all children, who would like to, are participating in school decisions and there needs to be greater emphasis on processes within schools rather than discrete structures (Percey-Smith, 2010; Cross et al., 2014; Wyse, 2001). Educational psychologists are well placed to support schools in developing their culture despite the current political pressures imposed on schools around attainment and teacher accountability.

The current research highlighted differences in staff's perceptions of inclusion and in their personal views regarding the extent to which children should be able to participate in decisions in school. The introduction of the Children and Families Act 2014 and subsequent SEND reforms (DfE, 2015) has highlighted difficulties being experienced in some secondary schools around the communication between the SENDCo and pastoral leader in the school as to whose responsibility it is to support children with the new category of Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Underpinning this difference could be staff's perceptions and beliefs around inclusion. This new categorisation provides an appropriate point to work with schools perhaps using Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) (Checkland, 1981) to develop their own understanding and ethos around inclusion and children's rights,

### **7.2.2 Group and individual level**

The importance of children and young being able to participate in decisions affecting them has most recently been underlined by the Children and Families Act 2014. This is significant for EP practice because since the 1970s the EP

role has diversified from mainly cognitive testing and assessing to include gaining the views of children and young people. The ways that EPs have done this in recent years through practice and research is both wide and varied (Gersch, 2017). Eliciting children and young people's views is now a crucial part of the EP role.

The current research has provided further evidence for the justification for EPs to provide support for staff to develop their capacity to enable all children to participate in decisions affecting them. The proposed model of participation in the current study could be helpful in supporting staff to ensure they are including the necessary elements for effective and inclusive pupil participation to occur.

There is scope for EPs to work with the adults linked to school councils to develop their skills in training the school councillors to use participatory techniques in their role. This might involve direct work with school councillors or training for the wider staff so that each member of staff knows the role they can play in facilitating successful pupil participation and ensuring the ethos reflects the expectations outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC. The most recent SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) highlights the importance of obtaining the child or young person's view as part of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment process. The use of participatory techniques in the current research provides evidence of the different ways children's views can be obtained. The EP could therefore support staff involved in this process, such as teaching assistants working with children and young people with SEND, to develop ways of eliciting their views using participatory activities best suited to that child or young person. Obtaining the child's view is sometimes not central to the process which it should be given the new SEND reforms. If it is embedded in the school for everyone, then they'd have experience of using different techniques. It has been argued by researchers in this field (Norwich & Kelly, 2006) that there is a potential role for educational psychology services to support schools in developing participatory practices which could benefit all children in mainstream schools.

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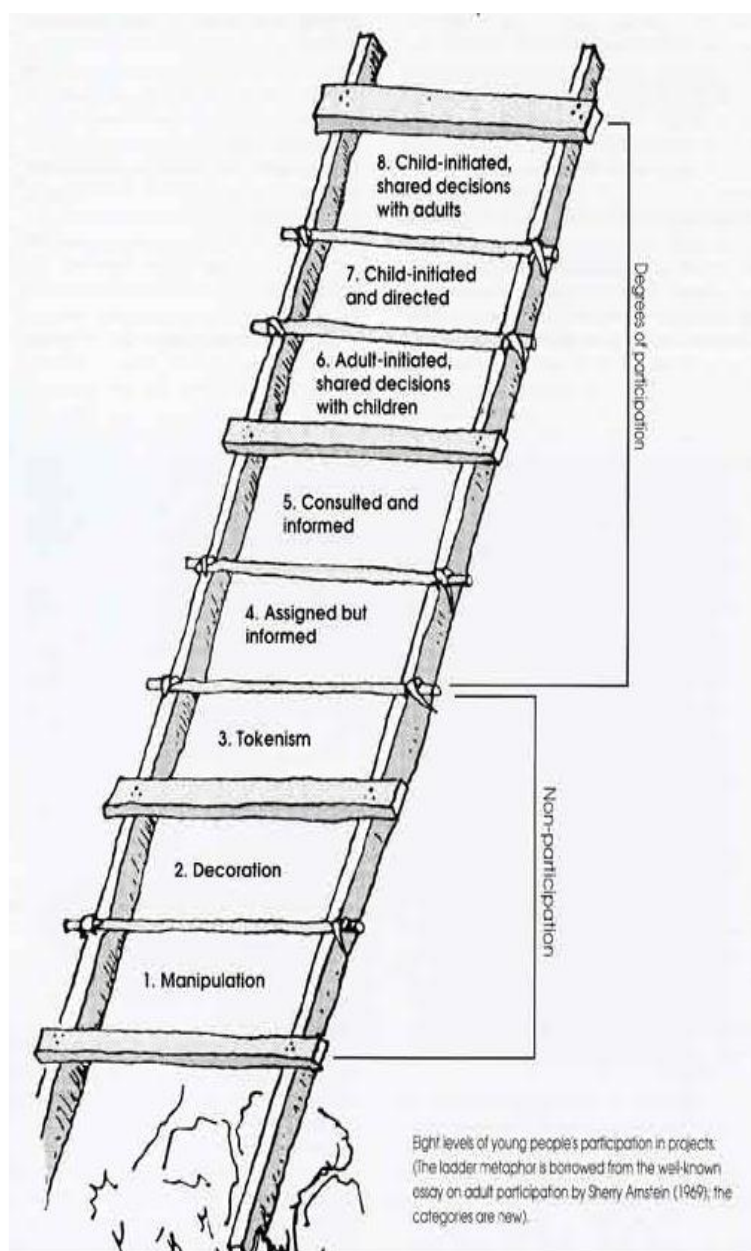
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## Appendix 1 Ladder of participation



*Figure 1: Ladder of Participation. Reprinted from Children's participation: from tokenism to citizenship (p.10), by R. Hart, 1992, Florence: UNICEF. Copyright © 1992 UNICEF International Child Development Centre.*



## Appendix 2 Pathways to participation model

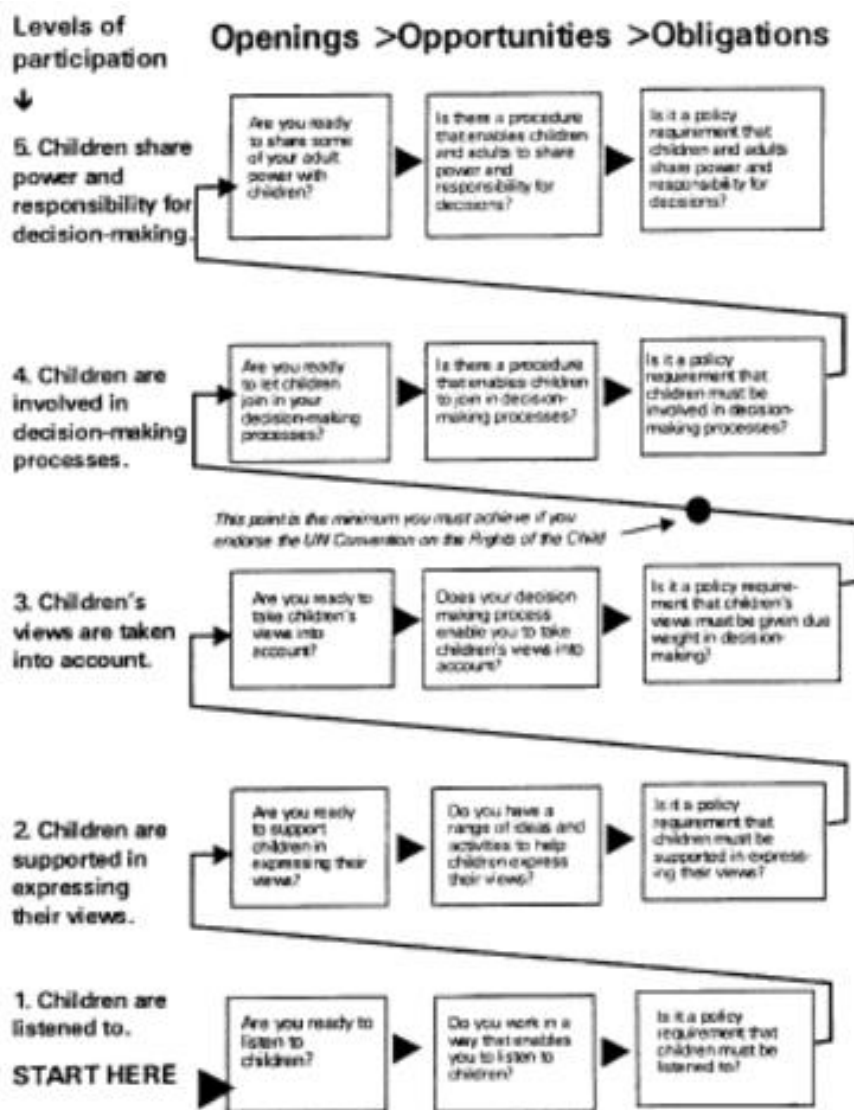


Figure 3: Pathways to participation. Reprinted from *Pathways to participation: Openings, opportunities and obligations* (p.111), by H. Shier, 2001, Children and Society.

### Appendix 3 Degrees of involvement model

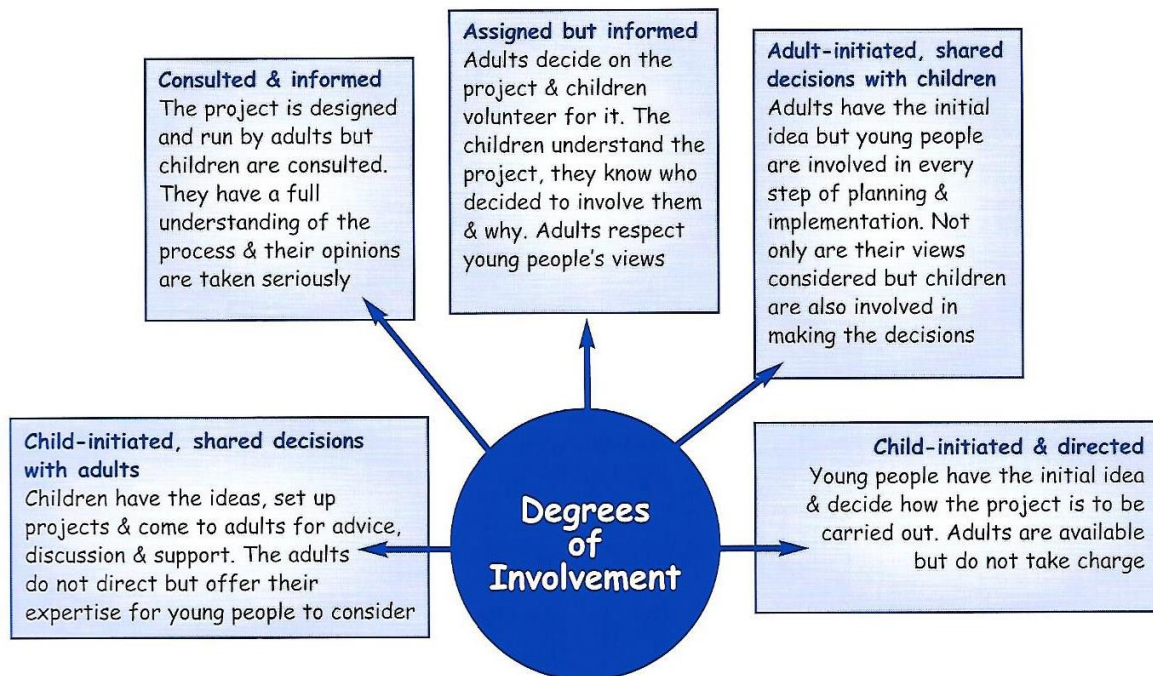
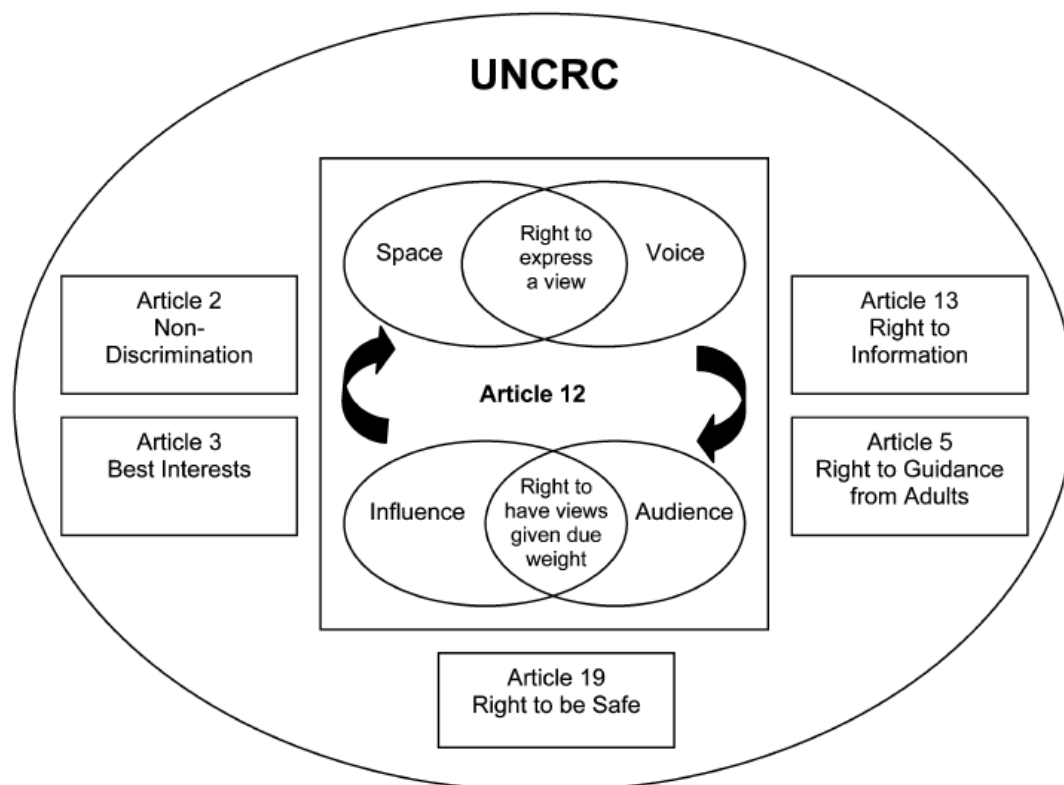


Figure 2: Reprinted from *Empowering children and young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision making* by P. Treseder, 1997, Save the Children.

#### Appendix 4 Model Conceptualising UNCRC Article 12



*Figure 4:* Model conceptualising UNCRC Article 12. Reprinted from 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (p.932), by L. Lundy, 2007, British Educational Research Journal.

## Appendix 5 Certificate of ethical approval



**COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

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[www.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/socialsciences)

### CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Academic Unit: Graduate School of Education

Title of Project: An exploration into pupils' and staffs' perceptions of pupil participation in school and the role of school councils in primary schools

Research Team Member(s): Caroline Lafferty-Jenkins

Project Contact Point: [cj301@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:cj301@exeter.ac.uk)

Supervisors: Tim Maxwell, Shirley Larkin

This project has been approved for the period

From: 12<sup>th</sup> April 2016  
To: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017

Ethics Committee approval reference: 201516-076

Signature:

Date: 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Loble'.

(Matt Loble, Chair, SSIS College Ethics Committee)

## **Appendix 6 Staff information and consent form**



### ***An exploration into pupils' and members of staff's perceptions of pupil participation in school and the role of school councils in primary schools.***

#### **Details of Project**

The first part of this study aims to explore the views of teaching assistants, teachers and members of the senior leadership team about pupil participation in school. It also aims to explore their perceptions of school councils.

The second part involves interviewing members of the School Council about their role and with their involvement, working with them over several weeks to develop their understanding of inclusion and their skills in using a range of techniques in order to more effectively communicate with and elicit the views of other pupils.

#### **Part 1**

You are being invited to take part in the first part which would involve an interview with me lasting between 30-50 mins. The interview would be recorded so that it can be transcribed for analysis but it would be anonymous in that your name would not be included. If you would like to take part, please read the following sections. If you have any questions, please do contact me; my details are at the bottom of this sheet.

#### **Confidentiality**

Interview tapes and transcripts will be held confidentially. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below so that I am able to contact you at a later date if you wish). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

#### **Data Protection Notice**

The information you provide will be used for the researcher's thesis and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University of Exeter's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be included in the thesis in anonymised form.

**Anonymity**

Interview data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name.

**Consent**

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher participating in this project in an anonymised form;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....

(Signature of participant)

.....

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

.....

(Email address of participant if they have requested to view a copy of the interview transcript.)

.....

(Signature of researcher)

.....

(Printed name of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).

Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

**Contact Details**

For further information about the research please contact:

Name: *Caroline Lafferty-Jenkins*

Email: *cj301@exeter.ac.uk*

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Dr Tim Maxwell, Research Supervisor, [T.Maxwell@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:T.Maxwell@exeter.ac.uk)

Dr Shirley Larkin, Research Supervisor, [S.Larkin@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:S.Larkin@exeter.ac.uk)

## **Appendix 7** Parental information and consent form for pilot interview with school council members



Dear Parent/Carer,

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist, working in Dorset County Council Educational Psychology Service and studying at the University of Exeter. As part of my training, I am carrying out research around staff's and children's views about school councils.

Part of my research involves interviewing members of school councils in different schools. In order to help me to develop my resources for use in this research, I would like to conduct pilot interviews with your son/daughter in a pair with another school council member. These interviews would not form part of the actual research but rather help me to develop and improve the materials I use when interviewing school council members. This would only be of course with your consent and if your child would be happy to take part. I would make this clear to your son/daughter on the day and let them know that they can decide to leave at any point if they wish.

The interview would take place next Thursday in school and would last approximately 15-20mins minutes. It would involve talking about the school council and/or drawing as well as using some sorting activities to help them explain their ideas.

If you give consent, I will also seek verbal and visual/written consent from your child and ensure they understand what is involved and that they can leave at any time.

### **Contact Details**

For further information about the research or interview data, please contact:

Name: Caroline Lafferty-Jenkins

Email: [cj301@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:cj301@exeter.ac.uk)

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Dr Tim Maxwell, Research Supervisor, [T.Maxwell@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:T.Maxwell@exeter.ac.uk)

Dr Shirley Larkin, Research Supervisor, [S.Larkin@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:S.Larkin@exeter.ac.uk)

### **Consent**

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for my daughter / son to participate in this research project and, if s/he does choose to participate, s/he may at any stage withdraw\* their participation;

- any information which my daughter / son gives will be used solely for the purposes of the development of the resources to be used in this research project.
- all information my daughter / son gives will be treated as confidential;

.....

(Signature of parent / guardian)

.....

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of parent / guardian)

.....

(Printed name of participant)



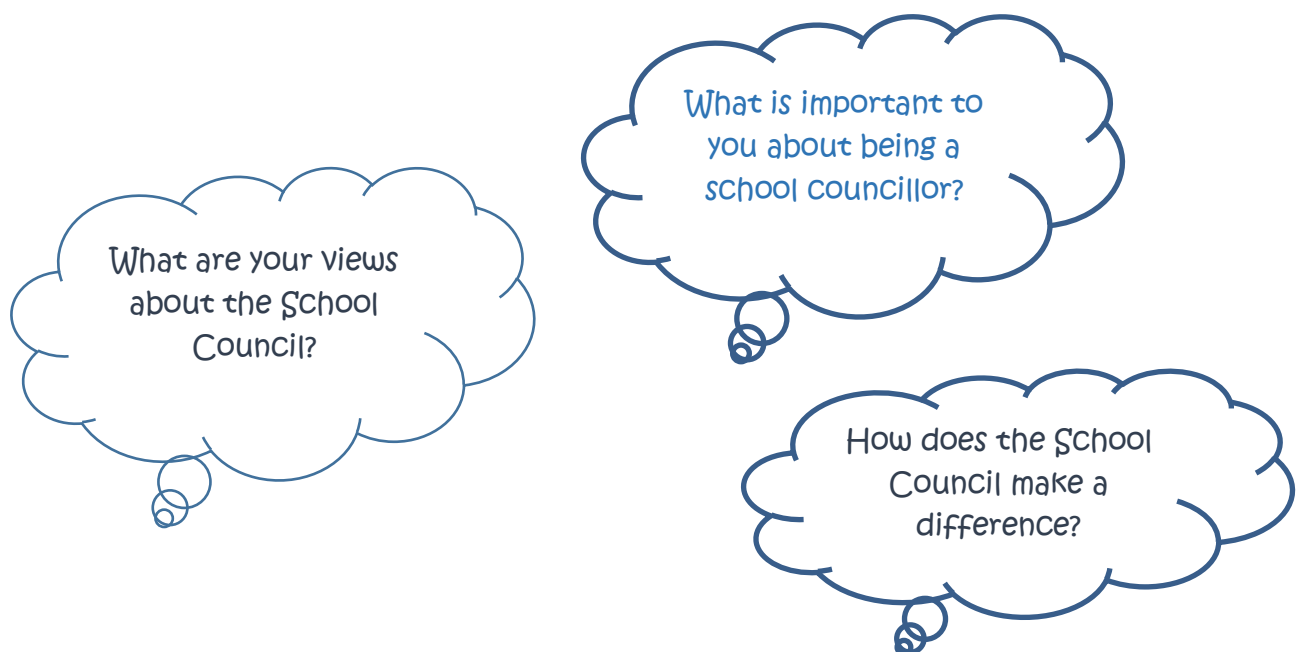
## Appendix 8 Pupil consent form



Dear .....,

My name is Caroline and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist. I am doing some research into school councils in primary schools and I am really interested in learning more about your school council and your ideas about it. Your Head Teacher has given me permission to ask you if you would like to take part and if you read the rest of this sheet, it will explain more about what it.

### What is our research about?



### What will our research will involve?

- I plan to come into school to work with members of the School Council for one session a week for 5 weeks.
- Your ideas and interests, as a school council, will be an important part of our research.

- I would like us to talk about topics like the ones in the **blue clouds** at the top of this sheet and some similar ones.
- We will be trying out different activities and games to help you to do your job as school councillors.

**Yes, I would like to take part!**

**Signed .....**      **Date**

.....

**If you would like to take part, it is important that you understand what is involved. We will read through this together and you can tick yes or no for each statement.**

**Please ✓ YES or No**

1. I have looked at and talked about the information sheet with Caroline and understand what it is about.



Yes



No

2. I understand that I can stop talking about something if I want to.



Yes



No

3. I understand that I can decide not to continue taking part whenever I like.



Yes



No

4. I understand that our discussions might be recorded to help Caroline remember what I've said.



Yes



No

5. I understand that what I say will be confidential but if Caroline thinks she needs to tell a trusted adult in school to keep me safe, she will talk to me about it first.



Yes



No

THANK YOU!

We will look at this sheet each week to remind everyone what we can do.

## Appendix 9 Staff interview schedule

Area	Questions	Further eliciting prompts
<b>Introduction</b>	Include comments and questions specific to school to demonstrate interest in and familiarity with their achievements and structures.	
<b>Understanding of pupil participation</b>	<p>What does the term 'pupil participation' mean to you?</p> <p>Tell me about pupil participation here at ..... Primary School.</p> <p><i>How would I know...?</i> <i>What would I see?</i></p>	<p>UNCRC Article 12?</p> <p>Tell me what you understand by the term 'pupil voice'.</p>
<b>Purpose of school council</b>	<p>Tell me about the School Council?</p> <p>In your view, what is the purpose of the school council?</p> <p><i>How would I know...?</i> <i>What would I see?</i></p>	<p>To what extent do you feel it is valued in school?</p> <p>How does the school council operate?</p> <p>To what extent do you think it is effective?</p> <p>Are there any barriers or enabling factors which may limit or develop their role?</p>
<b>School culture/ethos</b>	<p>What are the fundamental purposes for going to school?</p> <p>Can you tell me about a time when you saw pupil participation in action?</p> <p>How do the pupils feel about school council?</p> <p>How do you feel other staff view school council?</p>	

	<p>How inclusive do you think the school is in terms of pupil participation?</p> <p><i>How would I know...?</i> <i>What would I see?</i></p>	
<p><b>Priority or importance of pupil participation</b></p>	<p>How important do you think it is for pupils to participate in decisions affecting them in school?</p> <p>or</p> <p>To what extent do you think pupil participation is a priority in school?</p> <p>What areas do you think pupils should be able to participate in decision-making in?</p> <p>How would this happen in your opinion?</p> <p><i>How would I know...?</i> <i>What would I see?</i> <i>Elicit examples at different levels within school (</i></p>	<p>Do you think pupils' views should always have an impact on decisions affecting them?</p> <p>Do pupils sit on panels interviewing staff?</p>

Appendix 10 Formal Analysis Process diagram

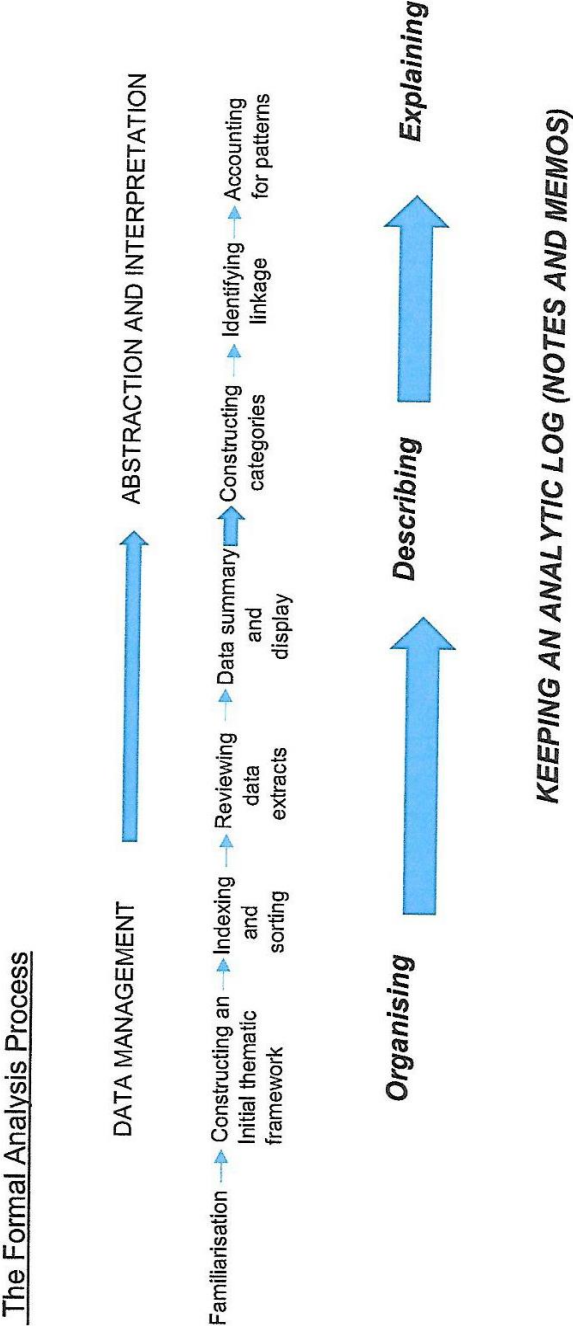


Figure 100. Diagram showing the steps involved in the Formal Analysis Process (Spencer et al. 2014)

Figure 5: The formal analysis process. Reprinted from *Qualitative Research Practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (p.281), by J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. McNaughton Nicholls and R. Ormston, 2014, London: SAGE Publications Ltd. Copyright 2003.

**Appendix 11a** Diamond ranking activity used in paired interviews in Phase Two

**Wearing a badge**



**Parents think it's a good idea**



**Learn how to have meetings**



**Find out children's views about school issues**



**Some children can have their say about things in school**



**To make life easier for adults**



**Raise money for charities**



**Improve the school playground**



**All children's voices can be heard by adults who make decisions**



**Anyone can be on the school council**

**There should always be an adult at school council meetings.**

**Adults should make all the decisions in school.**

**School councils are important in school**

**All children should be able to share their views with school council.**

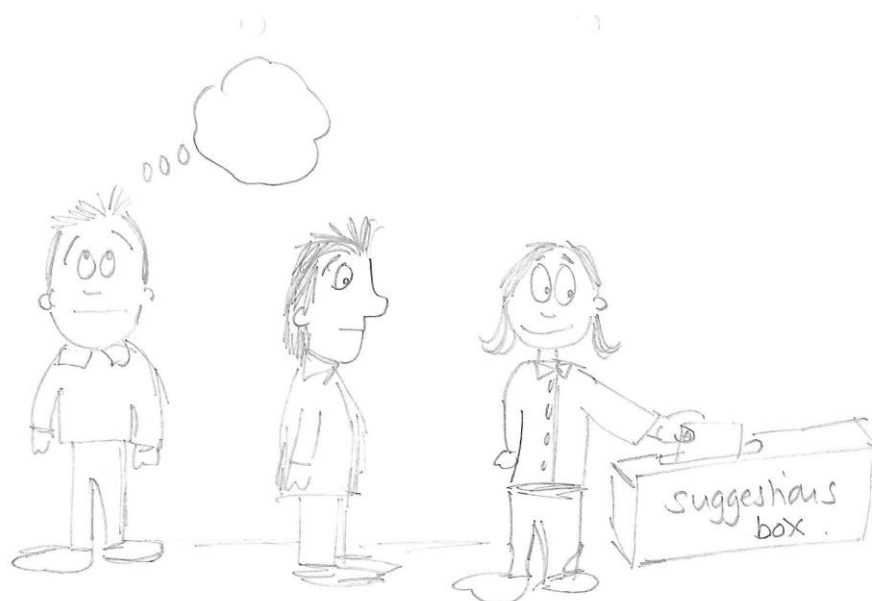
**It is important to have meetings and write everything down**

**Our school includes everyone**

**It's impossible to know the truth.**



**Appendix 11c** Examples of drawings used during paired interviews in Phase Two



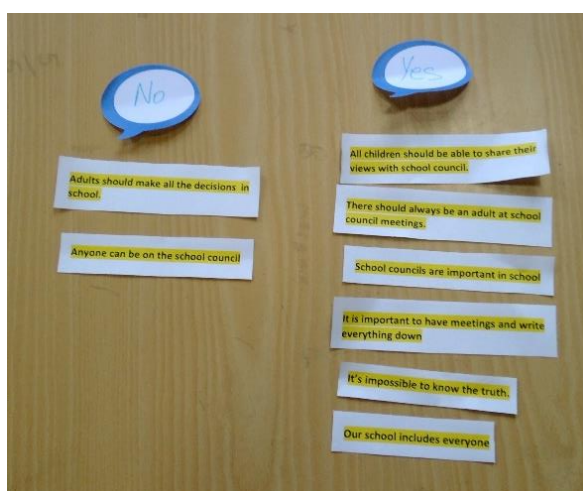
## Appendix 12 Example of interview ranking and sorting activities from initial and final interviews.

Year 6 (School A)

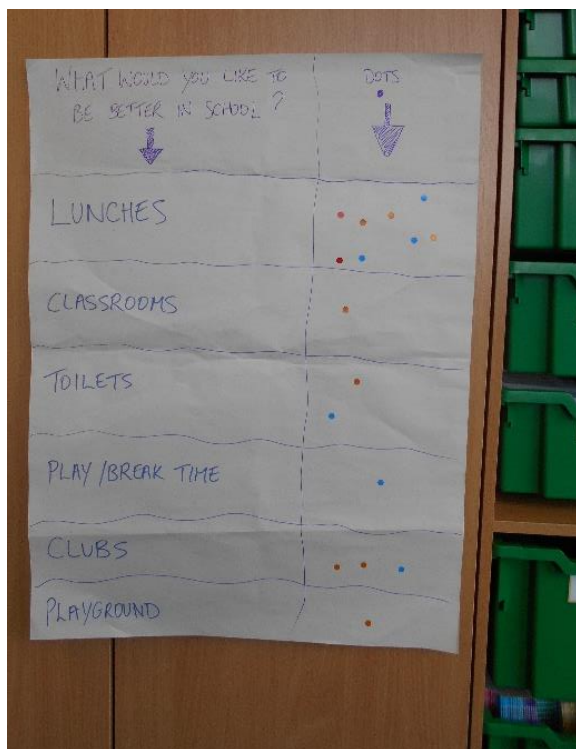
Initial interview



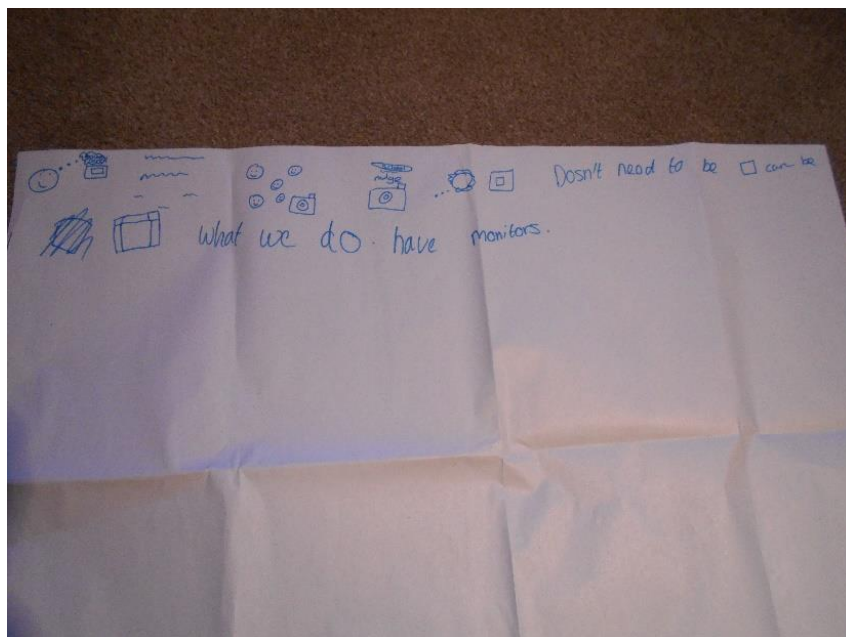
Final interview



## Appendix 13 Example of participatory activities from group sessions.

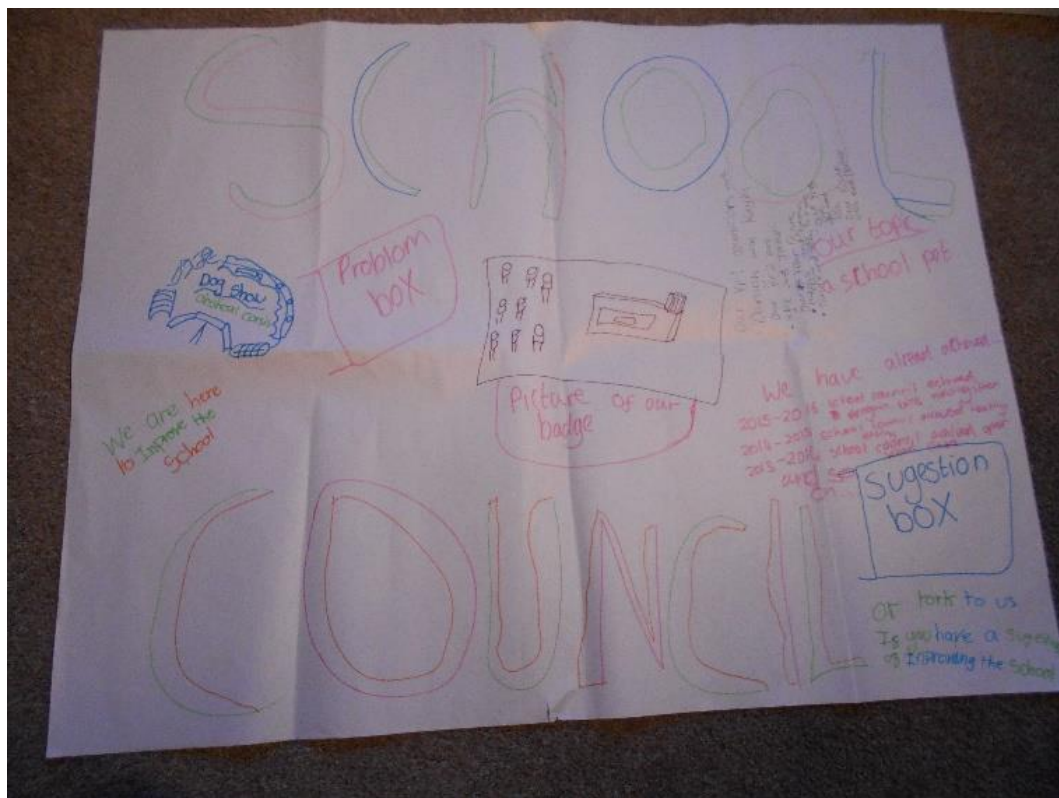


Photograph 1. This shows the Dot voting activity adapted from *Participation: Spice it up!* (Save the Children Fund, 2002)



Photograph 2. This shows an example of a pupil's recording of group discussion using pictures and symbols instead of sentences.

**Appendix 13** Example of participatory activities from group sessions.



Photograph 3. One of the school council I notice board designs

## **Appendix 14** Initial codes applied to data (Phase Two)

### Perceptions of school council

Child to child communication  
Improve the school  
Link between pupil and adult  
Responsibility  
Expectations  
Achievements  
Personal qualities  
Meetings  
Helping adults  
Wider impact  
Problem solvers  
Other pupils' views about school council

### Perceptions of decision making in school

Joint decision making  
Adult response  
Nature of truth  
Sharing of ideas  
Teaching and learning  
Children's ideas

### Other

Inclusion  
Ways of eliciting pupils' views  
Young children



## Appendix 15

Matrix showing example of labelled data extracts under revised themes

	Themes and data extracts linked to initial codes within each theme				
	Joint decision making	Adult response	Expressing views	Nature of truth	Including everyone
<b>School A</b> Yr 6	<p>No cause otherwise it wouldn't be very much fun. The school council as in the kids who have the roles help a lot and it's not just the adults</p> <p>If the adults do it what's the point of having the School Council, they're just having their own ideas, what's the point of having us.</p>	<p>the adults normally overrule things sometimes and they say, so last time we voted for a school pet and we were going to do one project and they chose the top three because they didn't think that school pet was a big enough project and I think that's fair but they could just say to the children.</p> <p>It was quite hard because we knew that school pet would win but the adults didn't really like that cause it was like six for school pet and like two for playground and two for toilets and one for everything else. But then they're</p>	<p>some children might not want to have a say</p> <p>some children might just want to share stuff with their classmates and suggest ideas not what they think</p> <p>Yeh but some people do silly things, like we should have a heated swimming pool</p> <p>Then we go into class and then ask them and then write it down and give it in to the adult and they would see so instead of having a massive queue we'd just tell them and read off the sheet which is kind of easier. Because we've actually had lots of ideas about lessons and improving the lessons and we haven't had that very often so that's quite clear that some people want to improve the actual like learning as well as all the things,</p>	<p>Lots of different truths and it's impossible to know 'the' truth</p>	<p>Because otherwise if people weren't included then it will be unfair because they didn't get to share their ideas. the inspectors wouldn't be very happy yeh and so that's why its important (inclusion). And it also means that everybody gets to have fun</p>

		<p>asking our opinion so it's not really...</p> <p>I think that's kind of a bit</p> <p>They should have said if it's school pet or something or playground or something cause we've already done that, then we'll do the top 3 but they didn't</p>	<p>the other things like playground and the toilets and having a school pet and that stuff that we voted on the project for. But I think the next project we have may be voting for lessons but I think we should go for lessons even if no one votes for it because otherwise people aren't going to be having that much fun.</p>		
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**Appendix 16** Example of full interview questions schedule for a pair of children (key questions are highlighted).

C: Tell me about school council (key question)

C: How does that work? (key question)

C: So you vote as a school council (prompt)

C: Thank you B. L you said something a minute ago about making the students feel happy and safe? (prompt).

C: I notice you're wearing a school council badge... (prompt)

C: How come you wear a badge? (prompt)

C: Tell me a bit more about the letter? (prompt)

C: So what sort of pet are you thinking of getting? (prompt)

C: How will you decide eventually? (prompt)

C: Ok thank you. How come you wanted to join school council? (key question)

C: How did you find doing that? (prompt)

C: And now you are!

C: Ok, I've got nine reasons to have a school council and I'd like you both to put them in order from most to least important reasons for having a school council, so it looks like this (show diamond shape). How does that sound?

(INTRODUCING DIAMOND RANKING ACTIVITY)

C: Than an adult? (prompt)

C: Tell me about decisions you make in school? (Key question)

C: Is it tricky to decide? (prompt)

C: Finished? (prompt)

C: Ok. How about this one? (prompt)

C: Some children? Or all children? (prompt)

C: Ahh, who's got a badge on? (prompt)

C: Ah ok. And you've got **Learn how to have meetings** in the middle? Tell me how your meetings work?

C: Ok, I've got some statements and I'd like to hear whether you agree with them or not. There's no right or wrong answers -it's your opinions I'm interested in (explaining statement activity)

(Children choose statements one at a time, read aloud and discuss)



C: So what would you say that you mainly do? **(prompt)**

C: Oh right, tell me about that **(prompt)**

C: Ok, and L you said everyone talks at the same time? **(prompt)**

C: How does she do that? **(prompt)**

C: What does that mean to you 'to include everyone'? **(prompt)**

C: Could a teacher not just stand up and ask instead of having a school council? **(prompt)**

C: How come? **(prompt)**

## Appendix 17 Fully coded transcript of interview with a teaching assistant.

Data	Code
<p><b>What does the term pupil participation mean to you?</b></p> <p>Well, basically how much they're willing to give themselves, how much they're putting their hand up do they feel brave enough... ehh... joining in in class discussions, so you'll get the children who you always hear their voice and the ones you never hear their voice so it's just about encouraging all the children to have a voice and join in.</p>	<p>1.1 During lessons</p> <p>1.5 Pupil voice</p>
<p><b>If a walked around the school, what would I observe in terms of pupil participation?</b></p> <p>Mmm, we mix the peer groups up a lot especially in the things I do with Oasis and Nurture groups, mix different age groups together to bring them out of themselves and encourage social interaction. Within a working class, mmm, there's lots of discussion, lots of talking partners so on the carpet and then on the table. We mix the ability groups sometimes to encourage just a bit more interaction, yeh and Im trying to think of (laughs)..I think as a school we are quite good at encouraging I mean at playtime we have the friendship bench so if someone feels they haven't got anyone to play with they can go there but they're never there that long because you'll always get pupils coming up and saying join in with us and come and play... eh</p>	<p>1.7 Outside of lessons</p> <p>1.1 During lessons</p> <p>1.7 Outside of lessons</p> <p>1.2 Ethos</p>
<p><b>Have you heard of the term pupil voice?</b></p> <p>No, I don't think so</p> <p><b>In your view, what is the purpose of the school council?</b></p> <p>To give the pupils their voice ad their views of how they want to see their school. You know, and sort of give their ideas and give them a bit of a sense of leadership within themselves and we vote so, there's two members from each class that we vote. Yeh and they meet with not myself and Im not sure how often but they go and have a really good chat. I do think it's good for the children in that again sometimes the ones who aren't always the first at sport and the popular ones they sometimes put their hand up for this and so It's nice to see those children being involved. Yeh and it just about them having a sense of a bit of leadership and a bit of oh im having my say and they can take it to their class and I think they should be able to take it to class and say 'right Im going to this meeting, what do you want to change, what do you want to happen?' Even at primary level you know, so I just think its good to....sorry Im probably being useless at this.</p>	<p>1.5 Pupil voice</p> <p>3.4 Benefits</p> <p>3.6 Process involved</p> <p>3.1 school council members</p> <p>3.7 Purpose</p>
<p><b>No not at all! I appreciate you taking time to share your views. Could you tell me a bit about the SC here at xxxx</b></p> <p>Yeh, they normally meet during some assembly times and discuss different things like you know, when Pudsey day is coming up and all those sorts of things, charity things and they walk around the school, they go on walks and think what could we change? What could we make better? And they also, they can be ambassadors when we have visitors in and so on and so forth.</p>	<p>3.6 Process involved</p> <p>3,7 Purpose</p>

<p>To what extent do you think the SC is valued in school? It's very popular.</p> <p>Is that amongst pupils, staff ....? I'd say pupils</p> <p>How do you think staff feel about the SC? If I'm honest, they don't really, cause I've never, it doesn't really come up on my radar..... I think it's really important though.</p>	<p>3.8 Other pupils' perceptions</p> <p>3.3 Barriers</p>
<p>In your view, are there any barriers which limit the SC in their current role? There can be, it can be the person that sort of runs it. There could be more, you know in briefing, they could say the school council think that...or saw that....</p> <p>Do you think parents are aware of the SC much? No, I don't think so. Not that I'm aware of.</p> <p>Are the SC on the school's website do you know? They are on the website yes.</p> <p>So it sounds like you think promoting it more would be good? I think it would be beneficial and then as staff don't really know, you know if it was spoken about more we could then say to them more 'Well done...that was such a good idea' You know just get it out there a bit more.</p>	<p>3.3 Role of adults</p> <p>3.2 Role of adults</p> <p>1.3 Staff involvement</p>
<p>In your opinion, what is the fundamental purpose for children to go to school? Mmm well to learn, to be part of and feel part of something. To be safe cause for lots of children that I you know, that's quite important to feel safe in school. To have a routine, stability...sorry could you say the question again</p> <p>Yes of course, in your opinion, what is the fundamental purpose for children to go to school? Yes, obviously like I say to learn, education and to be part of a group and to be safe really. And for a lot of children now that is their safety and their routine. It's steady and always there.</p>	<p>1.8 Reasons for school</p> <p>1.8 Reasons for school.</p>
<p>You mentioned to learn, can you tell me a bit more about that? Just generally yeh,</p> <p>How inclusive do you think the school is in terms of pupil participation? I think our school is extremely inclusive. I think XXXX as a HT is always very, I think whenever we've had an issue she's always really good at helping us overcome difficulties that can be quite tricky with some of our LAC or whatever. I just think we're a very inclusive school, we've had to deal with some very quite difficult pupils over the last 12 months and normally it's myself or my colleague that has to deal with them (laughs) and yeh, although it can be seen as they're getting special treatment, it's treating the need as we all know but yeh, I think xxx is brilliant as HT at being inclusive and since xx has taken over as HT cause we had a different HT, I feel it's a lot more inclusive now, I think we're extremely inclusive.</p>	<p>1.6 Inclusive</p> <p>1.2 Ethos</p> <p>1.6 Inclusive</p> <p>1.2 Ethos</p> <p>1.3 staff involvement</p> <p>1.2 Ethos</p>

<p><b>So what do you think has changed?</b></p> <p>I think we've done, xx has provided us with a lot more training on behaviour and how to deal with different behaviours so it's not being seen as like a I say special treatment and it's treating the need. Xx has employed lots of 1:1s to deal with these children whereas maybe before it would be not done. And to be fair I think it's the training of staff to understand that the children aren't you know I don't want to say not normal but you know that we have to be inclusive and we have to adapt ourselves for their needs</p>	
<p><b>How important do you think it is for pupils to participate in decisions affecting them in school?</b></p> <p>I think it's really important, cause ultimately if they're not happy and they don't feel safe they're not going to learn. Giving them a voice and giving them a say at whatever age then you can work together can't you to get a good outcome.</p> <p><b>What types of or areas of decision making do you think pupils should be involved in?</b></p> <p>I do think they should have a say in a lot however there are situations where I mean for instance with our LAC that are desperate to see their biological, obviously for their safety-no. But I do think they should have a say in their class you know what they want to learn, I mean I know you can't with a class of thirty children (laughs) but I do think a lot of discussion and listening. If a child feels listened to you know they feel valued, sorry I keep diverting on</p>	<p>1.5 Pupil voice</p> <p>2.2 Appropriate issues</p> <p>1.2 Ethos</p>
<p><b>Not at all, it's fine. If pupils have contributed their ideas but the person making the ultimate question says it isn't possible, what do you think should happen in that situation?</b></p> <p>Well whoever the adult is in charge of SC should sit them down and say well we could do some fundraising or this can't happen for, you know be honest don't, you have to be honest with the children, so this can't happen because however... in the future we can look at doing a cake sale or ..I don't know, try to give them a little bit of hope but they know they've obviously got to work for it.</p> <p>I do think you need to be honest or otherwise all children will be wanting an iPad you know (laughs)</p>	<p>2.5 Adult response</p> <p>2.1 Sensible ideas</p>
<p><b>We're almost at the end now. Some schools prioritise the process of school council over other reasons for having a school council. For example they place importance on the structure of the meetings, having a chair person taking minutes etc. How do you feel about that?</b></p> <p>I think having a voice and representing their class and their school is more important that they have their say in what they want to happen for their school. And having different ideas for different trips, one year we went on a school trip and ask about that. You know they should go back and ask their classes then take it to the meeting. I think it's more about having a say- they've got many years to come for that sort of thing... that's just my opinion. (laughs)</p> <p><b>Is there anything else you would like to add or ask?</b></p> <p>No I'm fine.</p> <p><b>Well, thank you very much. It was lovely to meet you.</b></p>	<p>3.7 Purpose</p> <p>3.5 Communication with other pupils</p>

And you.	
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